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Rih al-sadd/Man of Ashes (Nouri Bouzid 1986) Picture courtesy BFI Stills

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¹ In this paper, I usually use *pinyin* to transcribe Chinese names, phrases and titles for films or books and wherever appropriate give their equivalent in romanized Cantonese. However for Cantonese filmmakers my preference is to use the romanized Cantonese version of their name. Thus Wu Pang – not its *pinyin* equivalent Hu Peng. The name for mainland Chinese director Cai Chusheng is given only in *pinyin* because he was not a Cantonese filmmaker. In the body of the paper, I apply the Chinese nomination style for Chinese/Cantonese names only – that is surname (Cai or Wu) always precedes given name (Chusheng or Pang). In the footnotes the sequence for names conforms with *Screen*'s stylistic requirements that is, surname last.

² For a discussion see See Kam Tan, *Dangerous Encounters: the New Hong Kong Cinema and Postcoloniality*, unpublished PhD thesis, Melbourne University 1997 pp. 189–230.

³ There are several ways of understanding this phrase. Firstly, *zu* means ancestors/ancestry. *Guo* means country/nation. *Jia* means home/family. *Xiang* means home town/home village. Combining *zu* with any of the other three characters produces *zuguo* (ancestral country), *zuya* (ancestral home) and *zuxiang* (ancestral home town). Finally the ordering of the phrase *zuguo jiaxiang* indicates a hierarchy of identities in a descending order of importance. Accordingly a person can occupy any one of these categories or all at the same time. This hierarchy makes no provision for class, gender and sexuality distinctions, however.

⁴ See Paul Clark, 'The sinification of cinema: the foreignness of film in China', in Wimal Dissanayake (ed.), *Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections on Films from Japan, India, and China* (Lanham MD: University Press of America 1988) pp. 175–8.

Chinese diasporic imaginations in Hong Kong films: sinicist belligerence and melancholia

SEE KAM TAN¹

This essay is a study of the extent to which sinicism – the ideology of one China, one people and one culture – impacted on Hong Kong cinema from the late 1930s to the late 1960s. It is not specifically designed to discuss the constitution of local identities in Hong Kong films during this period.² Rather, it seeks to compare the ways in which sinicism guided and informed the practices of diasporic Chinese filmmakers in Hong Kong before 1941 and after 1945, and how these filmmakers constructed Hong Kong in sinicist terms. The constructions varied, but may be collated along a continuum marked off by two phenomena, which I shall call 'sinicist belligerence' and 'sinicist melancholia'. Both phenomena point to the burden of diaspora resulting from the historical conjunctures of nationalist struggle and colonialist design in China during the first half of the twentieth century. This burden compelled Chinese filmmakers in Hong Kong to evaluate intellectually and emotionally not only their historical displacement and cultural dislocation but also their love–hate relationship with China, a simultaneously alluring and forbidding love-object that was also *zuguo jiaxiang*, their motherland and home.³

Sinicist in film emerged in Shanghai around 1930.⁴ This was an aesthetic, political, ideological and cultural process which involved infusing film (a western technology) with Chinese/nationalist characteristics in order to create a distinctive 'Chinese' model of filmmaking. The process involved a sort of technological

5 The field of Chinese filmmaking has historically been divided in terms of generations. See Xudong Zhang *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1997) pp. 215–31. The idea that the Han people are the rightful owners of China by virtue of their descent and their status as a majority race probably goes at least as far back as the Qin era (221 BC). See Conrad Schirokauer *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1978) pp. 51–3.

6 Ibid. p. 219.

appropriation which resulted in the domestication of film technology and its concurrent transformation into a Chinese art form. The second generation of (Han) Chinese filmmakers,⁵ especially those working before 1937, undertook the task of sinicizing film in the name of Chinese nationalism and modernism. For Chinese filmmakers at the time, film was still a relatively novel medium. This encouraged experimentation which, to a large extent, accounted for the unprecedented artistic dynamism and stylistic innovations of that era, sometimes referred to as the Golden Age of Chinese filmmaking. Filmmakers in the 1930s also initiated and cultivated what was to become known as the social-realist tradition of Chinese filmmaking. As a genre, the social-realist film featured politically engaged narratives that sought change and progress by interrogating social problems, and that dealt with issues relating to national and class contradictions within the framework of struggle and emancipation. These were traits of belligerent sinicism. In his book, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, cultural historian Zhang Xudong links that genre's 'visually refreshing' and 'politically critical' cinematic form to a 'creative transformation' of Soviet and Hollywood influences, as well as to traditional Chinese theatre.⁶ If the sinification of film produced the social-realist film as the quintessential Chinese film genre, then it was already a hybrid, incorporating traditional Chinese art forms and assimilating foreign cultural influences.

At the time, Cai Chusheng was one of the foremost advocates of cinematic social realism. That he practised what he preached is evident in the films he directed: *Duhui de Zaochen/Dawn over the Metropolis* (1933), *Yuguangqu/Song of the Fishermen* (1934) and *Xinnuxing/New Woman* (1935), for example. These three films, all noted for their stylistic innovations and politicized aesthetics, became instant classics, and confirmed Cai's reputation as a politically committed director. There are two more reasons why Cai's films, especially those made in prewar Hong Kong, must figure centrally in a study of sinicist diasporic imaginations. His political activism and filmmaking activities, first in Shanghai and then in Hong Kong, provide a context for understanding the sinicist continuum in Chinese/Shanghai/Hong Kong films. And his particularly belligerent applications of sinicism to film art offer a vital basis for the contrast of cinematic sinicist melancholia in postwar Hong Kong. Sinicist melancholia is understood here not as a polarized opposition to sinicist belligerence, but as its complement-supplement. It also refers – here acknowledging Freud's study of melancholia⁷ – to the form of mourning that ensues from an inability to recover from the loss of a cherished object. Put contextually, this lost object is the dear and beloved China found in sinicist diasporic imaginations. In this respect sinicist melancholia departs markedly from its belligerent counterpart, in that narratives featuring the latter trait insist on a

7 Sigmund Freud 'Mourning and melancholia' in *Collected Papers* Volume IV trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press 1957) pp. 152–70.

hopeful treatment of China's modernity in linear and progressive terms.

To study the belligerence–melancholia continuum, then, my essay is divided into two parts, each comprising two subsections. The first part gives a historical perspective to the emergence of sinicism in the Shanghai film industry around 1930, its relation to the cultural Left, and its subsequent ‘export’ to prewar Hong Kong cinema. The second part pursues sinicism in postwar Hong Kong cinema, discussing it in relation to both the emergent Mandarin cinema and resurgent Cantonese cinema.

The cinema of the cultural Left

Cai Chusheng was born in Shanghai in 1906, but spent most of his childhood and all of his teens (1912–27) away from that city.⁸ In 1927 he returned to Shanghai, which had become the heartland of Chinese filmmaking. That year witnessed Chiang Kai-Shek’s successful coup and the installation of his Nationalist government (Guomindang). It also saw bloody campaigns of Communist suppression in various cities, including Shanghai. This drove many surviving members and supporters of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) underground. Needless to say, the four-year ‘marriage of convenience’ between Guomindang and the CCP came to an end.⁹ Cai was twenty-one years old. In Shanghai, he had numerous odd-jobs in the film industry, working as an extra, a log-keeper and a stagehand at the Huaju Film Company (1927–8), and then as an assistant director at the Mingxing Film Company (1929–31).¹⁰ Towards the end of 1931, he joined the Lianhua Company where he began writing screenplays and directing films, and where he made his name as Shanghai’s leading film director. He left the company in the final months of 1937, not long after the war between China and Japan erupted.

Luo Mingyou, a film entrepreneur from Beijing, had founded the Lianhua Company in 1930 following a merger of several studios, including those belonging to the Dazhonghua Beihai Company and the Shanghai Company.¹¹ This gave him a publishing arm and a complex film distribution system in urban China, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and a fighting chance to compete with the Mingxing Film Company, then the biggest and most established indigenous studio. However, foreign films, mostly from Hollywood, dominated this market, outnumbering local films shown in the theatres.¹² Luo had this foreign domination in mind when he announced that his company wanted to ‘revitalize Chinese cinema’.¹³ His ambition was to win over a film audience whose tastes had been nourished chiefly by imported films. For him, this meant making movies that promoted ‘indigenous culture’ and that urged ‘nationalism’. Luo hoped that a

8 For biographies of Cai Chusheng see Hongsheng Cai *Cai Chusheng de Chuangzuo Daozu/Cai Chusheng’s Path to Creative Works* (Beijing Wenshu Yishu Press 1982) and Fengren Huo and Jing Ai *Cai Chusheng* in Ye Chen et al (eds) *Zhongguo Dianyingjia Lie Zuan/Biographies of Distinguished Filmmakers in Chinese Cinema Volume I* (Beijing Zhongguo Dianying Press 1982) pp 338–49.

9 Schirokauer, *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilisations*, p 485.

10 For accounts of the Mingxing Film Company, see Sunlu Gong *Zhongguo Dianying Shi Hua/Talking Chinese Cinema History Volume I* (Hong Kong Nantien Books 1982) pp 34–106; Jihua Cheng et al (eds) *Zhongguo Dianying Fachang Shi/A History of Developments in Chinese Cinema Volume I* (Beijing Zhongguo Dianying Press 1983) pp 57–76; 200–245, and Yunzhi Du *Zhonghua Mingguo Dianyingshi/History of Cinema in the Republic of China Volume I* (Taipei Council for Cultural Affairs 1988) pp 67–80.

11 For accounts of the Lianhua Company see Gong, *Talking Chinese Cinema History Volume II*, pp 1–64; Cheng et al (eds) *A History of Developments in Chinese Cinema Volume I* pp 147–55, 245–70 and Du *History of the Cinema of the Republic of China Volume I* chs 6–8. See also Yunzhi Du *Zhongguo de Dianying/Cinema of China* (Taipei Huangguan Press 1978), pp 22–30.

12 Gong *Talking Chinese Cinema History Volume I* p 137 and Volume II, pp 12, 52.

13 Gong *Talking Chinese Cinema History Volume II* p 13 Clark ‘The sinification of cinema’ p 177.

revitalized Chinese cinema would be a counter to the usual fare of gods and spirits, superstition, brutality and violence served up by local filmmakers at the time To achieve this end, Luo intended to produce movies that abetted ‘universal education’, and that raised ‘social consciousness’. In short, Luo sought to make film relevant to Chinese culture and society, and he thus provided what can be taken as the first formal blueprint for sinificating cinema. Its subsequent politicization by the cultural Left was not surprising, since it concurred with the latter’s anti-commercialist agenda *vis-à-vis* the film industry

¹⁴ See for instance Quibai Qu Putuo Dazhong Wenyi de Xianshi Wenti/Real questions in the dissemination of mass art and literature’ in The Committee for Qu Quibai’s Writings (eds), *Qu Quibai Wenji/A Collection of Qu Quibai’s Writings*, Volume II (Beijing Renmin Wenzue Press 1953) p. 856

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer The culture industry enlightenment as mass deception in Simon During (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London Routledge 1993) pp. 29–44

¹⁶ See Shouzhong Liang *Wuxia Xiaoshuo Huo Guji/Talking about the Past and the Present through the Knight Errant Novels* (Taipei Yuan Liu Press 1990) pp. 17–21 175–78 See also Gong Talking Chinese Cinema History Volume I pp. 100–102, Cheng et al (eds) *History of Developments in Chinese Cinema*, Volume I pp. 70 133 177 229 Du Cinema of China pp. 146–51, 224

¹⁷ Tse Tsung Chow *The May 4th Movement Intellectual Revolution in China* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press, 1974) For an essay which specifically explores the relationship between May Fourth Literature and socialist films see Leo Ou-fan Lee The tradition of modern Chinese cinema some preliminary explorations and hypotheses in Chris Berry (ed.) *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (New York Cornell University Press 1985) pp. 1–20

¹⁸ Cheng et al (eds) *History of Developments in Chinese Cinema* Volume I pp. 171–200

For the cultural Left, the eighteen-part series, *Huo Shao Honglian Si/The Burning of the Red Lotus Monastery* (1928–31, hereafter the *Burning* series), produced by the Mingxing Film Company, epitomized the wrongs of the commercially oriented film industry. Its reviews invariably denounced the *Burning* series as exemplary of ‘poison films’ because it mindlessly and shamelessly promoted feudalism, bourgeois values and commercialism.¹⁴ These reviews, it would seem, concerned less the series *per se* than what Adorno and Horkheimer would have called the ‘cultural industry’, whose function was not just to produce standardized entertainment for mass consumption but also to unleash ‘mass deception’.¹⁵ Bu Xiaosheng’s *Jianghu Qixiaozhuang/Stories of Strange Heroes in the Martial World* began as a serialization in *Hongzazhi/The Scarlet Magazine* in the early 1920s. The stories appeared in three further forms before the decade was over: a comic serial in the weekly *Hongmeigui/The Red Rose*, a nine-volume novel and the *Burning* series.¹⁶ All forms of Bu’s *Stories* had a large following and, as far as the cultural Left (or, for that matter, the Chinese intelligentsia in general) was concerned, a ‘mindless’ one too, which was attracted to narratives featuring martial heroes and heroines with supernatural skills, to themes of escapism, revenge and retribution, and to motifs of feudalism and fatalism. The immense popularity of Bu’s *Stories* (and their derivatives) was thus a matter of political concern, a concern that intersected with sinicism

Sinicism as an ideology of social change and political reform had its roots in the May Fourth literary movement, or what Chow Tse Tsung calls ‘the intellectual revolution in China’, which emerged in the late 1910s.¹⁷ Its collusion and collision with cinema some ten years later appeared to be a belated one, but not too late for the cultural Left, as we shall see, to make dents in the commercially oriented film industry. The initial impetus came from the political activism of the May Fourth literary elite. ‘Big literary guns’ such as Lu Xun, Xia Yan and Tian Han founded the China League for Leftwing Dramatists and the China League for Leftwing Writers in the same year as the Lianhua Film Company.¹⁸ Their involvement gave the two Leagues the reputation of progressive respectability and radicalism, a reputation on which their members and supporters

¹⁹ For accounts of the Yihua Film Company see Gong Talking *Chinese Cinema History* Volume II pp 65–112 Cheng et al (eds), *History of Developments in Chinese Cinema* Volume II, pp 271–80, and Bugao Cheng *Yingtan Yiju/Memories of a Film World* (Beijing: Zhonghua Dianying Press, 1983) pp 195–211

²⁰ Cheng et al (eds), *History of the Developments of Chinese Cinema*, Volume I, p 97

²¹ Xiaoming Zhou *Zhongguo Xindai Dianying Wenxueshi/A History of Modern Chinese Film Literature*, Volume I (Beijing: Xinhua Books 1985) pp 145–78

²² Lee, 'The tradition of modern Chinese cinema' p 3 See also Chris Berry 'Chinese Left cinema in the 1930s: poisonous weeds or national treasures' *Jump Cut* no. 34 (1989), pp 87–94

(writers, dramatists, directors, actors, technicians) drew as they moved into the film world, first by way of the Lianhua Company, and then in the Mingxing (from 1932 onwards) and Yihua Film Companies.¹⁹ The Yihua Film Company was set up in 1933, a year which also saw the establishment of yet another leftwing organization, the China Cinema Cultural Association, whose founding members included Cai.²⁰ These moves enabled the cultural Left to forge a strong and coercive presence in the art, literary and film worlds.²¹

Meanwhile, the ethos of the cultural Left intersected with the growing call (by social reformers, urban intellectuals and students, for example) for national unity and cultural rejuvenation as a counter to military aggression from without and internecine tensions within. In September 1931 China lost Manchuria to Japan; in January 1932 Japan began air raids which escalated in both frequency and severity on Shanghai. The Nationalist government adopted a conciliatory line with Japan, but continued its campaigns of annihilation against the CCP, pursuing its members and troops into China's rural interior. In 1934, forced into retreat, the CCP began its famous Long March. These circumstances strengthened the call for national unity and anti-Japanese militarism, which, as mentioned, overlapped with the nationalist agenda of the cultural Left.

One effect of the Left's ideological strength was the growing prestige of socially conscious or social-realist films. The basic ethos of social realism, writes Leo Ou-fan Lee, observing the convergence between May Fourth literature and Left cinema, was 'criticism and "dark exposure"' of contemporary social ills motivated by 'a humanistic concern for the plight of the Chinese people'.²² In social-realist movies, imperialism, capitalism and feudalism were often offered as primary causes for the 'social ills' of modern China. With the rise of Japanese militarism, the social-realist paradigm also grew to incorporate *guofangpian*, or the national defence films, a subgenre which carried anti-Japanese motifs (and to which I will return).

The commitment to exposing social ills was the hallmark of belligerent social-realist movies. It was driven by the view that such exposure would shock the alienated masses out of their stupor – their 'slavish mentality' – and into taking political action. In other words, the cultural Left saw film (as it did other art forms such as literature and drama) as a crucial tool for the raising of social awareness and the political transformation of mass society. Left cinema derived its political currency from its commitment to oppose 'imperialism', 'capitalism' and 'feudalism', and accrued its cultural capital by promoting 'Chinese nationalism', 'national solidarity', 'patriotism', and 'progressive people'. This was the political logic for sinicizing film, the logic from which the belligerent sinicist subject emerged. Such belligerence was due to the tumultuous socio-politico-historical changes that were occurring at the time; changes that forced issues

²³ Prasenjit Duara coins the neologism by combining descent and dissent with which he gives a compelling historical account of how the Han Chinese (as opposed to Chinese minority groups) have time and again managed to secure cultural hegemony. See Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the National Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 17–82.

²⁴ See Gong, *Talking Chinese Cinema History*, Volume II, pp. 1–16; 19, 25–33, 38–40; 45–63; Cheng et al. (eds), *History of the Developments in Chinese Cinema*, Volume I, pp. 149–52, 334–9; Du, *Cinema of China*, pp. 169–80; Cui Yang, *Zhonghua Dianying Sanshidian/Thirty Years of Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Shi Jie Press, 1954), pp. 124–30.

of nationalism, race and culture onto the cinematic agenda. But as these issues hardened according to the imperatives of *dissent*,²³ the belligerent sinicist subject became a transhistorical, essentialist and idealized entity, tending towards a reductionist conservatism. Its features might be summarized as follows: unconditionally nationalist and racialist, vehemently anti-Japan(ese), anti-capitalist, anti-feudalist and anti-imperialist, embracing wholeheartedly the Han idea/ideal of ‘one China, one people, one culture’.

Though a dominant cultural force by the early 1930s, sinicist belligerence as it was manifested in the art, literary and film worlds was by no means uniform. Indeed it is debatable whether the strong support for social-realist films shown by urban intellectual and student moviegoers indicated any commitment to leftwing politics. In all likelihood they were simply attracted by the ‘progressive’ label which these films carried. In any case social-realist films soon acquired the status of hits.²⁴ Their actors became stars, and their directors (including Cai) were regarded with esteem. It is also debatable whether the belligerent sinicist filmmakers themselves embraced leftwing politics in toto, even if their films showed strong empathies with the underclass and the struggles of the proletariat. Equally indeterminable is whether Left filmmakers were necessarily pro-Communist (that is, pro-CCP and anti-Guomindang) since it was not uncommon to see the Guomindang flag rather than the CCP’s fluttering gloriously in their films, as in Cai’s *guofang* movies (mentioned below). On the other hand, there was always the danger of being labelled Communist: the Nationalist government was known to persecute, even execute, Communists. Whatever the case, prewar Shanghai filmmakers – from the far Left to the far Right of the political spectrum – found common ground in anti-Japanese nationalism.

If it is difficult to fathom the exact nature of Luo’s political leanings (in comparison to Cai’s, for instance), but it is clear that he was an astute entrepreneur and was therefore unlikely to complain as long as social-realist films were profitable. Because of their popularity, other filmmakers followed suit. The resulting economy of film production, sustained by the overlapping interests of entrepreneurs, Left cultural activists and moviegoers, led to the ascendancy of the Left cinema, and it was this economy which was disrupted when Shanghai fell to the Japanese in 1937. The Lianhua Film Company closed, as did the Mingxing, while the Yihua soon went bankrupt. Other companies filled the vacuum, but the heyday of Left cinema had passed. Meanwhile, hauling with him his ‘social-realist’ baggage and packing therein the belligerent sinicist subject, Cai headed for Hong Kong. There he was to stay for about four years, his expatriation cut short by the British loss of Hong Kong to the Japanese on Christmas Day, 1941. During his stay he made several films which are representative of the diasporic mindset of

exiled filmmakers in Hong Kong at the time. It is to these that I now turn

Sinicist belligerence: Cai in Hong Kong

Typically, the diasporic mindset foregrounds a painful struggle between a sense of displacement (where I am/we are from) and the reality of dislocation (where I am/we are at). It reflects the desire to reconcile, both intellectually and emotionally, the contradictions inherent in this struggle.²⁵ The resulting dilemmas fragment the diasporic subject. In Cai's case it is apparent that he had enormous difficulties with his displacement from Shanghai/China (construed as 'home'), and his dislocation in Hong Kong (construed as 'not-home'). The conflicts that arose from his refusal to accede to 'where he was at', and his relentless nostalgia for 'where he was from', determined his diasporic subjectivity. To put it simply, Cai could not leave his Shanghai baggage behind. This helps to explain his persistent attempts to transplant and transfix onto the Hong Kong screen Chinese Left cinema's sinified subject. As we shall see, his prewar films – especially their underlying politics – attest to this. But so do his postwar efforts for Nanguo/Nam Kwok, the movie studio which he helped to set up during his second stay in Hong Kong around the end of 1948. His contempt for the cinemas of both pre- and postwar Hong Kong was unequivocal. To him, 'mindless and senseless' commercialism prevailed over the industry; its products were of 'low quality', or simply 'senseless, stupid, ugly and repulsive'. In short, they were 'poison films'.²⁶ His rhetoric was still that of the cultural Left in prewar Shanghai.

Cai's position on Hong Kong cinema is not surprising given his history as a political activist and politicized filmmaker. During his second stay he instigated a 'clean-up' campaign to rid Hong Kong cinema of its poison films, not just advocating their replacement with movies with a social conscience, but also going as far as to organize the Hua Nan Filmworkers' Joint Declaration which had the primary aim of doing just that.²⁷ Nam Kwok was founded on this ethos. With its aura of the politics and aesthetics of 1930s Shanghai Left cinema, Nam Kwok's inaugural feature, *Zhujiang Lai/Tears of the Pearl River* (1950), produced by Cai but directed by Wong Wei-yi, testifies to the continuing presence of sinicist belligerence in postwar Hong Kong. Its anti-feudal and anti-capitalist motifs echo those found in prewar Shanghai social-realist pictures.

Cai's disdain for prewar Hong Kong cinema (and correspondingly for Hong Kong) can, then, be attributed to his cultural displacement. This is apparent in the film projects with which he was associated between 1938 and 1941. *Youyi Jinxing Qu/March of the Guerrillas* (Xinchao, 1938, hereafter *March*), *Xuejian Baoshan Cheng/The*

²⁵ See Paul Gilroy 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at – the dialectics of diasporic identification', *Third Text* no. 3 (Winter 1991) pp. 3–16.

²⁶ Cai Cai Chusheng's Path p. 51
Translation mine

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 90–1. Translation mine

Blood-stained Baoshan Fortress (Xīnshídài, 1938, hereafter *Blood-stained*), *Gudao Tiantang/Orphan Island Paradise* (Dādǐ, 1939; hereafter *Orphan*) and *Qiancheng Wanli/Boundless Future*, aka *Ten Thousand Li Ahead* (Xīnshèng, 1941, hereafter *Boundless*) Of these features, *Boundless* (scripted and directed by Cai) contains a subplot which makes especially clear the extent of his contempt for Hong Kong film culture. In this, a Hong Kong filmmaker, known simply as Great Director (played by Zhao Yishan), has just completed a new film called *Baiwan Yingwen/A Million Ghouls* To promote it, he assembles a small team of ‘death-ghouls’ to parade on a busy Hong Kong street. The ‘ghouls’ draw attention to themselves noisily with drums and trumpets, and carry a banner which has the title of the new film, cross-bones, and two slogans. One announces ‘SPIRITS AND SPECTRES IN BROAD DAYLIGHT’ (in Chinese mythology, spirits and ghosts are nocturnal creatures), the other carries an equally idiotic warning ‘DO NOT MISS THE MOVIE, OR YOU WILL FALL SICK AND DIE’ The crowd gathering to watch the parade is generally amused. Along come two pedestrians, one of whom carries a basket from which an object falls. A ‘ghoul’ retrieves it for them. They flee in terror. The crowd roars with laughter. A man in the crowd becomes agitated and tries to stop the charade. A human-versus-ghoul struggle ensues. The crowd laughs even louder. It is not clear if the agitated man and the terrified pedestrians are part of the promotional performance for *A Million Ghouls*, but it is apparent that this subplot mocks the ridiculous extent of commercialism in the Hong Kong film industry. The crowd that witnesses the farce is not spared either. Supported by techniques such as the unsteady camera, Cai gives the street scenes a semblance of ‘documentary truth’, of ‘everyday reality’. Rather insidiously, the film thus patronizes Hong Kong film culture ‘Look, look at these mindless people! They not only enjoy a silly charade, but actually stage one!’

It can be inferred from the subplot in *Boundless* that Cai’s Hong Kong ‘hate-list’ included horror flicks. Given his political orientation, Cai was most unlikely to have taken kindly to this genre, especially given its emphasis on superstition, and *Boundless* was released on January 1941, following an unprecedented number of local horror movies. According to *Hong Kong Filmography, 1913–1941*, eleven horror pictures were released in 1939, a huge increase on the production figures from the preceding years: none in 1938, four between 1934 and 1937, and none before 1934.²⁸ Apart from horror films, it is not clear if Cai’s hate-list also included the staples of Hong Kong cinema at the time – melodrama, comedy, romance and folklore movies.²⁹ What is evident is his tendency to dismiss Hong Kong cinema wholesale, with one exception.

Cai approved of *guofang* movies, national defence films. As mentioned before, *guofang* movies belong to a subgenre of

²⁸ *Hong Kong Filmography 1913–1941* Volume I (Hong Kong Urban Council, 1997) pp. 610–61
²⁹ Ibid

social-realist film, and first emerged in Shanghai in response to Japanese militarism in China. While in Hong Kong, Cai's support for the Chinese War of Resistance (against the Japanese) was unswerving. This was evident not only in his prewar Hong Kong features, but also in the articles he wrote for Hong Kong newspapers. For example, in *Huasheng Bao* (1941), he exhorted patriotism in singular terms: 'All good sons and daughters of the Chinese race', he wrote, had the responsibility of working together to expel the Japanese invaders.³⁰ Elsewhere he exhorted Hong Kong filmmakers to dedicate their films to 'country and race', and to focus their efforts and resources on *guofang* pictures which, he took utmost care to emphasize, 'our country and race most urgently need'.³¹

³⁰ Cai Cai Chusheng's Path p. 53
Translation mine

³¹ Ibid

³² For a discussion of Hong Kong between 1937 to 1945 see L Kit-Ching Chan *China, Britain and Hong Kong 1895–1945* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990) pp. 265–330

³³ Ibid pp. 268–79

³⁴ See *Hong Kong Filmography* Volume I p. 553

³⁵ Paul Fonoroff, 'Hong Kong cinema', in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 35

There was no immediate reason for the Hong Kong Chinese to support the War of Resistance but many apparently did, some driven by patriotism, others feeling compelled to retain China's goodwill to ensure their long-term commercial interests.³² As a British colony, Hong Kong's priorities did not always overlap with China's. Neither the British government nor the Colonial Office of Hong Kong was keen to take sides in the Sino-Japanese war; they insisted that the colony remained 'neutral'.³³ In other words, Hong Kong, as a British colony, had a separate political identity from China the (besieged) nation-state, even though Hong Kong, as a ceded Chinese territory, was culturally and emotionally connected with China the motherland. The colonial censors would have reminded Cai of this when they banned *March*, a *guofang* film, from exhibition in 1939. It was more than a year before a revised version was released under a new title *Zhengqi Fei/Song of Retribution* (Xinchao, 1941, hereafter *Song*).³⁴ Although there is no direct evidence, the reasons why *March* was banned can be inferred: colonial censorship laws strictly forbade the identification of the enemy as Japanese.³⁵ This run-in with the colonial government did not seem to have dampened Cai's belligerence. Rather, it strengthened his resolve, evinced by his subsequent films and newspaper articles, to 'mobilize' the Hong Kong people towards patriotism by appealing to their 'Chinese race'. This meant denying that Chinese people might have multifarious histories. His totalizing appeal – signalled by such encompassing terms as 'our' and 'all' – suggested that for Cai the Hong Kong Chinese were somehow unpatriotic, though if making *guofang* films were a measure of patriotism then some quarters of the prewar Hong Kong film industry were already such patriots. The earliest known Hong Kong *guofang* movie was made before Cai came to the territory. It was a silent film, entitled *Zhandi Guilai/Return from the Battleground* (Guolian, 1934), which featured a patriotic young Chinese man (from Hong Kong?) fighting the Japanese, following the 'December 8 incident' in Shanghai in 1932. Seventeen further *guofang* movies were made in 1937 (the year Shanghai fell to the

Japanese), while thirty-nine were released between 1938 and 1941 (the period roughly coinciding with Cai's sojourn).³⁶

This last production figure does not include the four *guofang* pictures associated with Cai *March/Song*, *Blood-stained*, *Orphan* and *Boundless*. At the time of my research for this paper, I was only able to access *Song*, *Orphan* and *Boundless* in the Hong Kong Film Archive. Prints of the other *guofang* films mentioned in this paper have not survived. They include *March*, the banned version of *Song*. Despite the revisions, *Song* retained the spirit of the *guofang* subgenre which Cai outlined in an article for *Li Bao* in 1938. For him, *guofang* movies should depict Chinese patriotic heroism, refer to Japanese war atrocities, show the deadly battles fought by Chinese generals and soldiers in the front-line; portray the brave struggles of Chinese civilians in the occupied regions, and exhort, both directly and indirectly, the Chinese people to participate in the War of Resistance.³⁷ *Song* (and for that matter, *Orphan* and *Boundless*) had all these traits but not overtly, thus allowing it to circumvent the colonial censorship laws. For example, the narrative context insinuated the identity of the enemy without naming it. Alternatively, the presentation of a particular type of treacherous Chinese – the *hanjians*, or traitors to the Han race – implicated the Japanese as invaders. *Hanjians* were so called because they worked for, or collaborated with, the Japanese invaders (or, for that matter, any non-Han Chinese aggressors).

Of Cai's prewar Hong Kong films, the one that most clearly reflects this position is *Orphan*, made two years before the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong. This film – scripted and directed by Cai – has a didactic and moralistic focus: its protagonist, Mystery Youth (played by Lee Ching), seeks out and kills *hanjians* in the extraterritorial district of Orphan Island, which is contextually understood as a district in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. Here treason is defined precisely by the act of transgressing the discursive parameters of the sinified subject. To be able to single out *hanjians* is to be able to recognize heterogeneities within a naturalized construct like the sinified subject. And this recognition demands disavowals, which, in the case of *Orphan*, are manifest in the belief that *hanjians* were national, racial and cultural aberrations, and as such should be culled. The process of ridding Shanghai (and correspondingly China) of *hanjians*, then, works reciprocally to affirm the existence of 'patriots', since proof of their patriotism relies precisely on their ability to identify and/or execute *hanjians*.

Boundless foregrounds different objects of menace to the sinified subject: imperialism and capitalism. Here Cai dwells on the mythologized proletariat of Shanghai Left cinema, and retrieves two of its stock figures – the prostitute and the worker – for the main roles, using their miseries and deprivation as a basis for his

critique of social injustice and oppression in Hong Kong. The protagonists are Chinese war refugees in prewar Hong Kong. One is a young woman from Northeast China, Xiao Feng (played by Rong Xiaoyi). Through a flashback, we see her memory of her family gathering for a meal just moments before bombs fall on their home, killing all but her – the bombs serving as a reminder of the Sino-Japanese war. Presently alone and in exile in Hong Kong, she is forced to work as a prostitute by a local pimp (played by To Sam-ku) who treats her as a ‘sub-human’.³⁸ Her Hong Kong clients treat her no better. The other protagonist is a patriotic truck driver, Lao Gao (played by Lee Ching). Upon discovering that the truck company delivers goods (tungsten ore) to a Japanese arms manufacturing plant, Lao tries to incite a revolt, but before he can do this he is beaten by thugs and thrown into gaol. The collective yet idiosyncratic experiences of Xiao Feng and Lao Gao emphasize the foreignness of the Chinese territory that was Hong Kong. This idea is reiterated at the level of language: all the refugees speak Mandarin, while Hong Kong people use only Cantonese. The former are portrayed as poor but proud and hardworking, the latter – a sadistic pimp, a mean landlady, two contemptible policemen, some fearsome thugs – are not. Conflicts develop in the contact zones between Chinese refugees and Hong Kong ‘natives’, with the former invariably on the receiving end of the imperialist/capitalist stick. In sum, Hong Kong provides no refuge for Chinese refugees like Xiao Feng and Lao Gao. The montage which shows a hungry Xiao Zhang (played by Lee King-po), Lao Gao’s friend, staring at well-fed dogs lapping up their meals, further reinforces the picture of Hong Kong as an inhospitable and inhumane place. The analogy here is obvious: in Hong Kong Chinese refugees are treated worse than dogs.

Like Xiao Feng and Lao Gao, Xiao Zhang is a typical proletariat figure in Shanghai Left cinema. The narrative conventions mean that they must endure exploitation and oppression until they are redeemed. Typically redemption depends on a momentary vision in which such characters – as individuals – realize that their fate is determined by class factors and so begin to forge a collective unity with fellow class members. In *Boundless*, this begins when Lao Gao and Xiao Zhang rescue Xiao Feng from her pimp and invite her to live with them. It does not matter that they are penniless. What matters is class and its putative collective power. This unity has a nationalistic application: in *Boundless* it brings together a group of Chinese war refugees for the War of Resistance.

The importance of linking proletarian consciousness to nationalism is also stressed in *Orphan*. Dance-hostess (played by Li Lili), Dumb-hawker (Li King-po) and Little Fool (Lan Ma) are all stock figures of the underclass in Shanghai Left cinema. By variously assisting Mystery Youth with his patriotic tasks they become patriotic by association. For example, it is Dance-hostess who informs Mystery

³⁸ For a discussion of the prostitute figure in Chinese cinema see Rey Chow *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 23–6.

Youth about the ball at which he finally wipes out the treacherous Skull and Bone spy-ring (its leader included). Although not named directly, the people for whom the spy-ring worked are contextually implied to be the Japanese invaders.

Another message in *Boundless* is that capitalism has corrupted Chinese nationalism. The so-called Patriotic Song and Dance Troupe is a case in point. Promoting itself as a troupe which performs national defence numbers, its songs and dances are anything but related to national defence. They are a far cry from the patriotic rendition given by Xiao Zhang to his friends on a make-shift stage in his tiny room earlier in the film: 'China', he sings, 'will not die!' By contrast the troupe promises a striptease when its routine of high-kicking, skimpily clad girls fails to draw a crowd.

In Hong Kong, noted especially for its corruption, immorality and exploitation, where else could the *Boundless* refugees turn for redemption and salvation but to China? The film ends with them leaving Hong Kong, and returning to the motherland. Assembled under the Guomindang flag which flutters proudly in the wind, and dressed in the uniform of the Resistance Army, they are clearly elated. 'Good bye, Hong Kong', says Xiao Zhang, while Lao Gao adds, 'Hong Kong? I have had enough of this place.' In opting to become patriots, the refugees do the 'Chinese thing', and make the 'Chinese decision': they take up the cause of resisting the (unnamed) Japanese invaders. Like the patriotic Mystery Youth and his companions in *Orphan*, it is apparent where their loyalties must lie. As Lao Gao pronounces firmly to his fellow refugees in *Boundless*, 'My friends! Our body may be in exile, but our heart cannot forget our *zuguo* (ancestral land), not even for one day.' In both *Boundless* and *Orphan*, then, Chinese nationalism, mediated through the sinicified subject, becomes a key signifier of cultural origin and belonging, which in turn furnishes the crucial discursive basis for sinicist belligerence.

Sinicist melancholia and Hong Kong's postwar Mandarin cinema

While a pervading sentiment in Cai's prewar Hong Kong pictures, sinicist belligerence was but one of many political and aesthetic ideologies seeking its place in the commercially orientated film industry that Hong Kong cinema was (and still is).³⁹ As mentioned above, its presence can still be detected in Cai's postwar efforts – in Nam Kwok, for example – but during the postwar years another form of sinicism in film emerged, what I call sinicist melancholia, whose cultural investment was markedly different to that of sinicist belligerence. Its subsequent rise to dominance in postwar diaspora-cinema pushed its belligerent counterpart into the wings. One important reason for this was the Japanese surrender in 1945, which

³⁹ See Poshek Fu 'Patriotism or profit: Hong Kong cinema during the Second World War' in *Early Images of Hong Kong and China* pp. 73–9.

made anti-Japanese themes somewhat less urgent than questions of, say, postwar reconstruction

Another important reason was the nature of the postwar Chinese diaspora in Hong Kong, which resulted primarily from refugees fleeing the Chinese civil war and Communist victory. Amongst them were many wartime and postwar Shanghai filmmakers. After the war, wartime Shanghai filmmakers (entrepreneurs, directors, scenarists, actors and technicians) found themselves variously denounced as *hanyians* or blacklisted as Japanese collaborators by the Nationalist government (which returned to power after World War II), or simply shunned by their postwar colleagues. They progressively left for Hong Kong between 1946 and 1949. Postwar Shanghai filmmakers – especially those who supported the Nationalist regime – fled following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, fearing persecution from the Communist victors. According to Ng Ho, diasporic Shanghai filmmakers from postwar China were largely responsible for the appearance of the 'cinema of turbulence' and the 'cinema of exile' in Hong Kong.⁴⁰ The former was so called because its films had wars as a backdrop, wars which not only provided the metaphor for *luanshi*, a turbulent time, but were also offered as the chief cause of personal misfortunes and broken homes. The latter was so called because its films were about Chinese exiles. Both types of films were made in Mandarin (the language of Shanghai cinema) and manifested sinicist melancholia.

The latter provided a sharp contrast to the belligerence of sinicist filmmakers such as Cai, which was derived from their desire to see China freed from imperialist, capitalist and feudalist oppressions, and from their conviction that one day this would really happen. Their works looked to the future optimistically. Sinicist melancholics might look to the future too, but differently. Those postwar Shanghai filmmakers who supported the Nationalist government basically just wanted their China to be free of Communism. The resounding victory of the CCP in 1949 made that future despairingly bleak. As for wartime Shanghai filmmakers, their prospects for a future in China were even bleaker because they carried the stigma of having stayed at work under the Japanese. Neither the CCP nor the Guomindang were likely to ignore that. Effectively forced into permanent exile, both wartime and postwar Shanghai filmmakers could only regard China from afar, and see it in the mourned terms of a lost homeland. They were reduced to longing nostalgically for a place to which they could never return.

These exiles might be likened to Freud's 'mourners', that is, people who, because they could not get over the loss of their precious love object (for example, a lost nation or a lost idea), would eventually introject this loss into their ego.⁴¹ As a result, they would experience 'a profoundly painful [sense of] dejection, [an] abrogation of interest in the outside world, [a] loss of the capacity to love'.

⁴⁰ Ho Ng, 'The cinema of turbulence: the emotional state of Shanghai film talents working in Hong Kong in the period 1946–1950', in *Cinema of Two Cities* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1994), pp. 30–4; and 'Exile: a story of love and hate' in *The China Factor in Hong Kong Cinema* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1990), pp. 31–41.

⁴¹ Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', pp. 152–70.

⁴² ibid p 153

⁴³ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1993) pp 3–5

⁴⁴ Ng 'The cinema of turbulence' pp 30–4

⁴⁵ Ng 'Exile' pp 31–41

⁴⁶ Ibid., p 34 See Lynn Pan *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: the Story of the Overseas Chinese* (London: Arrow 1998) pp 106–27
175–204 246–74

Eventually they would go through ‘a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment’.⁴² In her book, *Writing Diaspora*, Rey Chow questions Freud on the point of the mourner’s ‘“self”-directed denigration’.⁴³ For her, Freud’s exclusive focus on how the melancholic might act in relation to his or her lost love object is problematic because it loses sight of how the melancholic might behave in regard to other people. This critique yields the following supplement rather than simply ‘self’-directed, says Chow, denigration is also directed at others. Melancholics, in other words, externalized their losses by blaming others for their cause.

In the ‘cinema of turbulence’ women tended to serve as the scapegoat for men’s losses, a characteristic that led Ng to call it also the ‘cinema of fathers’. Ng conducts a ‘simple content analysis’ of seventeen Mandarin films made by exile Shanghai filmmakers (all male) between 1946 and 1950.⁴⁴ He observes that in these films – which varied in genre from historical drama and melodrama to tragedy – war-fatigued men return from the front line, often with their spirit broken and/or their bodies wounded. Meanwhile women – in the absence of men (fathers, husbands and sons) – have learnt to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. For Ng, the meeting of these men and women constitutes a crisis of Confucian patriarchy, for unless the women give in to male demands, tragedy will ensue – tragedy which becomes associated with women who stand their ground. Ng concludes that in these films women are invariably made to shoulder the blame for men’s losses.

Men’s losses were a recurring theme in ‘movies of exile’ too, the emergence of which Ng links (in another essay) to Hong Kong’s sociopolitical turmoils, especially those occurring in the 1950s.⁴⁵ Following the Communist victory in China there was a massive flight to Hong Kong of refugees who were mostly housed at the Tiu Keng Leng refugee camps in Junk Bay. With inflation and widespread unemployment, many previously highly privileged people (intellectuals, high-ranking army officers, government officials) were compelled to live in appalling conditions and to subsist on an income derived from menial labour and odd jobs. According to Ng, it was in Tiu Keng Leng that a ‘literature of exile’ first appeared. Such literature is not just important as a sociocultural documentation of Hong Kong society in the 1950s. It also shows us, Ng argues, how the exiles got on with their lives and how insults to their dignity and pride gave them a greater resolve to live and the will to survive.⁴⁶

Written principally by Chinese intellectuals-turned-refugees, the literature of exile comprised accounts of personal trials and tribulations, and took various forms, including essays, short stories and novellas. It was a major source for film adaptation. While

47 Ng 'Exile' p. 34

evoking 'realism, in a meditative and self-reflective manner', observes Ng, its pervading tone was 'mournful, pessimistic and misanthropic'.⁴⁷ If some writers did espouse the idea of 'begin[ning] one's life anew', questions of 'the task of saving China [from Communism]' and whether Hong Kong could offer 'eternal sanctuary' persisted. The following passage from Zhang Yifan's novella, *Chun Dao Tiaojingling/Spring Comes to Tiu Keng Leng* (1954) used a characteristically sexual metaphor 'I will come only when we have recovered the Mainland', says Mingzhong exasperatingly in response to prostitute Bing'er's insistent question: 'Last night ... why didn't you come, not even once?'.⁴⁸ In being insistent, Bing'er also becomes the typical 'burdensome' woman

For the most part cinematic representations of male impotence caused by social upheavals or as an effect of sexist melancholia were more coy. 'I'm afraid I can no longer give you happiness', says the male protagonist to his female counterpart in Yi Wen's *Lian zhi Huo/Fire of Passion* (Xinhua, 1955). Illness was a common stand-in for impotence, with consumption a ready reference. The disease caused the afflicted to waste away both physically and spiritually, while the blood expelled from the body pointed not just to a pair of bleeding tuberculous lungs but as much to a heart bleeding inconsolably from the loss of a love-object. In short, consumption served as metaphor for loss.

The tragic love between Fan (played by Zhao Lei) and Fengxi (played by Ge Lan, or Grace Chang) in Wang Tianlin's *Ti Xiao Yinyuan/The Story of Three Loves*, Parts 1 and 2 (MP & GI, 1964, hereafter *Three Loves*), serves as an illustration. *Three Loves* is adapted from Zhang Henshui's novel, the narrative style of which accords with the 'Mandarin Duck and Butterfly' school of romantic fiction.⁴⁹ Immensely popular in the 1910s and 1920s, this literary genre subsequently became a major source for Chinese melodrama. In Wang's film, Fan plays the typical faithful, obsessive and melancholic lover. During his absence, he loses his beloved Fengxi to the tyrannical Warlord Marshall Liu (played by Qiao Hong), who makes her his concubine. His subsequent wallowing in mournful nostalgia is forcefully conveyed in the scenes in which he wanders aimlessly in the Tianqiao District of Beijing, where he was first smitten by Fengxi. On his last trip he coughs out blood, narratively a sign of consumption and an index of melancholia. The blood also suggests Fan's sexual impotence, a breakdown in the supply of blood for erection. The suggestion that Fan suffers from melancholia-induced sexual impotence is also conveyed by his lack of interest in Xiugu (played by Lin Cui) and Lena Ho (also played by Ge Lan), the other two of the three women who apparently are deeply in love with him. *Three Loves* obviously contains national allegories. Fengxi symbolizes the Chinese Republic and its ideals, which urban intellectuals (such as Fan) support and love unconditionally but

49 For a discussion of this literary genre see Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: the Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minnesota MN University of Minnesota Press 1991) pp. 34–120.

which are destroyed by Warlordism (personified by Marshall Liu). Or, to put it in another way, under the careless and cruel care of a Warlord, a promising young woman (the short-lived Chinese Republic) is first driven to a nervous breakdown, then to her death. Meanwhile a university student (urban intellectualism) does all he can to rescue her from an unhappy marriage (the alliance between Republicanism and Warlordism) but to no avail. Sinicist melancholia is thus manifest in a complex weaving of sexual metaphors and nationalist allegory.

The ‘cinema of exile’ was similarly less direct than its literary equivalent in its anti-Communist stance, often resorting to fables to make its political points.⁵⁰ Based on Zhao Zifan’s novel, Tu Guangqi’s *Ban Xialo Shehui/Half Way Down* (Asian Film, 1955; hereafter *Half*) was thus more an exception than the rule – one film critic describes it as the ‘rightwing answer to leftwing dramas centred on the underclass’.⁵¹ *Half* deals with a group of refugees explicitly as victims of Communist China. Otherwise, films of exile were like their literary counterparts in using Mandarin as a medium of expression and in depicting melodramatically the agony, anguish and anger of Chinese exiles: characters dispersed by *luanshi*, women fallen into depravity, men plagued by illness and condemned to rove.⁵² In these films Hong Kong is a refuge from Communism but not home, while mainland China is home but not a haven. The films are obviously anti-Communist but connected by several threads to their ‘leftwing’ counterparts. They use Mandarin and are adamant that China is *zuguo jiayi*, the motherland, they reject Hong Kong not simply because it is a capitalist society under colonial rule, but also because its capitalist/colonial culture is perceived to be harmful in particular to moral-ethical precepts of Chineseness, especially to those ideas of the ‘Chinese Spirit’, ‘Chinese Community’ and ‘Chinese Nation’ encompassed in the sinicist concept of *zuguo jiayi*.

Even the obviously anti-Communist film, Tu’s *Half*, denies the simplistic equation of ‘anti-Communism’ and ‘pro-Capitalism’. At the end of the film Li Man (played by Liu Qi) decides to give up her life of material comfort as a rich man’s mistress and return to Tiu Keng Leng, whose poverty she had earlier sought to escape. The film depicts this as the right move, just as her earlier decision to become a rich man’s mistress is portrayed as a moment of weakness. A fire sweeps through the camps on the day she returns. In its aftermath she is reunited with her friends, among whom is Pan Lingxian (played by Chen Yun) ‘This fire!’, Pan says to her, handing her a bag of soil which the old teacher brought from China. ‘May it burn in us and make us stronger!’. Li’s return to the fold is a return to an idealized ‘China’ at Tiu Keng Leng. If a longing for an imagined *zuguo jiayi* was central to sinicist melancholia, it is, characteristically, the men who remain loyal to it (the old teacher’s

⁵⁰ Ibid pp 38–41

⁵¹ Programme notes in Ng *The China Factor in Hong Kong Cinema* p 140. For a discussion of films from leftwing and rightwing camps in postwar Hong Kong cinema see Kar Law *The shadow of tradition and the Left-Right struggle* in ibid pp 15–20

⁵² Ng *Exile* p 38

bag of soil), while women lapse Lí trades China for the material comfort of Hong Kong.

Zuguo jiāxiāng was a persistent theme in postwar Mandarin films. It pervaded films with a Chinese setting (Cai's *Orphan* and Wang's *Three Loves*, for example), and could be observed equally in films not set in China (Cai's *Boundless* and Tu's *Half*, for example). Stephen Teo has even suggested that:

Hong Kong might as well not have existed. The Shanghai émigrés were making 'Shanghai' films – films set in that city or its environs with Hong Kong locations dressed up as its streets and quarters. Characters behaved like typical Shanghai residents, their dialogue laced with Shanghai-isms.⁵³

Law Kar's critique of Yue Feng's *Nanlai Yan/Home Sweet Home* (Great Wall, 1949, hereafter *Home*), a social-realist film set in postwar Hong Kong, supports Teo's comment. *Home*, observes Law,

looks at Hong Kong society from the perspectives of Chinese exiles. Distortions and exaggerations are inevitable when Hong Kong is depicted like pre-liberation Shanghai: a paradise for the rich, a hell for the poor, and a city filled with all kinds of exploitation, oppression, immorality and chaos.⁵⁴

This view of Hong Kong, continues Law, shows that the Mandarin filmmakers had not taken time to learn about the territory. Rather, Hong Kong becomes a site of displacement and dislocation, and films like *Home* provoke 'a sense of mismatch'.⁵⁵

This sense of mismatch is an effect of both the feeling of dejection and the abrogation of interest in the outside world which Freud identified as major symptoms of delusional self-reproach. This, as Chow might add, expressed itself no less in the denigration of the self (China) than in the vilification of the other (Hong Kong). The relentless construction of Hong Kong as an inhospitable place for Chinese exiles and refugees in *Home* (and, for that matter, *Half* and *Boundless*) readily attests to this. So do the endings of these three films. *Boundless* and *Home* end with Chinese immigrants, exiles and refugees gladly abandoning Hong Kong, while *Half* ends with a reunion of Chinese friends in a Tiu Keng Leng camp. The point of such images is not merely to depict patriotism, loyalty, and the unity of communities-in-diaspora. They also define such communities as intrinsically Chinese. And so sinicist melancholia infused postwar Mandarin films: with dreams of recovering a lost land, fantasies of a triumphant homecoming, and tales of returning to the prelapsarian garden. It is not a coincidence that the hand-painted backdrops depicting scenes of Beijing in the 1910s are the only constant feature in Wang's *Three Loves*. In these backdrops, amidst the cries and furies that accompanied great social change and personal loss, sinicist memories were preserved.

⁵³ Stephen Teo 'The Shanghai hangover' in *Cinema of the Two Cities* p. 17. See also Teo *Hong Kong Cinema: the Extra Dimensions* (London: British Film Institute 1997), pp. 3–39, 73–84.

⁵⁴ Kar Law 'Programme notes', in *Early Images of Hong Kong and China* p. 163. Translation mine.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Postwar Cantonese cinema: the early Wong Fei Hong films

⁵⁶ For a discussion of Hong Kong's postwar cinema see Teo *Hong Kong Cinema* pp 40–60 and Tan *Dangerous Encounters* pp 198–234

Sinicist melancholia also swept through postwar Cantonese cinema⁵⁶ It was especially evident in *guzhuangpian* (or *guzhuang*) films, which often featured a self-contained world found spatially in China and temporally in a past which ranged from antiquity to the early twentieth century. Another defining feature of *guzhuang* films was the wardrobe – *guzhuang* literally meaning ancient or traditional costumes The three chief paradigms of *guzhuang* films were martial arts pictures (including swordplay and *kung fu* features), opera pictures and historical dramas, and the total corpus of such films is huge It is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the impact of sinicist melancholia on such movies *per se* Rather, I will focus on a paradigmatic example *kung fu* features and, more particularly, the early *Wong Fei Hong* (aka *Wong Fei Hung*, in pinyin: *Huang Feihong*; hereafter, the *Wong* series) films (1949–70), so named to distinguish them from their post-1970 counterparts⁵⁷

⁵⁷ For the *Wong Fei Hong* filmography, see the catalogue compiled by the Hong Kong Film Archive *Renzhe Wudi – Huang Feihong Dianying Xinshang/Wong Fei Hung The Invincible Master* (Hong Kong: Urban Council 1996) pp 20–27 See also Tan, *Dangerous Encounters* pp 207–20

⁵⁸ Hector Rodriguez Hong Kong popular culture as an interpretive arena the *Huang Fei Hong* series *Screen* vol 38 no 1 (1997) pp 1–24 and Mo Wan Yu, 'The prodigious cinema of *Huang Feihong*: an introduction' in *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1980), pp 80–6 revised and retitled 'The Kwan Tak Hing era: characteristics of the golden age of *Wong Fei Hong* cinema' *HKFM* no 2 (1994) pp 8–17

⁵⁹ Pang Wu, *Wo yu Huang Feihong/I and Wong Fei Hong* (Hong Kong: Sanhe Trading Co 1997) For a brief biography see Wu Pang/Hu Peng in *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film* p 172

⁶⁰ Wu I and *Wong Fei Hong* pp 45–49

⁶¹ *Ibid* pp 61–4

In their research on the *Wong Fei Hong* corpus, historians of Hong Kong cinema Yu Mo-wan and Hector Rodriguez have made the observation that the *Wong* series used the dialect of the majority of Hong Kong's population and reflected the Cantonese culture and the traditions of the surrounding hinterland of Guangdong province⁵⁸ On this, I agree with them, but only to a point. This analysis tends to gloss over the diasporic factor in the filmmakers responsible for the *Wong* series (its cast included). A closer look at their background reveals that they were not primarily Hong Kong natives! Take director Wu Pang (in pinyin: Hu Peng) as an example.⁵⁹ Although of Cantonese (as opposed to Hong Kong Cantonese) descent, Wu was born in Shanghai in 1910 He mostly lived there until his move to Hong Kong in 1936, where he made his directorial debut with an Cantonese opera feature, *Ye Song Hanyi/Sending Winter Clothing by Night* (Sheng Li, 1938) Wu did not make films while in Shanghai. His induction to the world of movies came chiefly from working at the Beijing Cinema as a subtitle-projectionist for foreign pictures⁶⁰ This cinema also showed local films, mostly from the Lianhua Film Company Wu was thus exposed to both foreign and local films and became an avid fan of Cai, whom he considered to be one of his 'unofficial' filmmaking teachers On his days off he would go to the Lianhua studios to watch 'the famous director' (his phrase) at work.⁶¹ Yet if his 'mixed' repertoire in prewar Hong Kong is any indication, then he was probably nowhere near as belligerent as Cai in using films to push the patriotic agenda. Besides *guofang* movies such as *Zhanshi Qinghua/A Warrior's Love* (Damingxing, 1938) and *Daidi Chenzhong/The Tolling Bell* (Bai Li, 1940), Wu made films which Cai would certainly have detested romance pictures such as *Yiye Fuqi/A Night of Romance, A Lifetime of Regret* (Damingxing, 1938)

- ⁶² Wu claimed he directed this film but in *Hong Kong Filmography* it is attributed to Wai-man Leong. For synopses of the four films see *Hong Kong Filmography* Volume I pp. 215, 286, 375, 436.
- ⁶³ For a brief biography see Wong Fung/Wang Feng in *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Films* p. 185.
- ⁶⁴ For a brief biography see Szeto On/Situ An' in *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Films* pp. 183-4.

- ⁶⁵ Wu, *I and Wong Fei Hong* p. 9. For a brief biography see Kwan Tak-hing/Guan Dexing in *A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Films*, p. 175.

- ⁶⁶ See Yu, 'The Kwan Tak Hing era' pp. 8-17. See also Mo-Wan Yu, 'Introduction' in Wu *I and Wong Fei Hong* p. 1.

- ⁶⁷ See Stuart Tannock 'Nostalgia critique' *Cultural Studies*, vol. 9 no. 3 (1995), pp. 453-64.

and horror movies such as *Guwu Jiangshi/Vampires of the Haunted Mansion* (Damingxing, 1939).⁶²

As the principal director of the *Wong* series throughout the 1950s, Wu developed the prototype for the series with the chief scriptwriter, Wong Fung (in *pinyin*: Wang Feng), a native of Guangxi who grew up in Guangdong.⁶³ In the 1960s, Wong took over from Wu as the series' chief director, while Szeto On (in *pinyin*: Situ An),⁶⁴ a native of Guangzhou, filled the vacated seat of the main scriptwriter. This creative lineage helps to account for the series' consistency in form and style. The lead actor for the *Wong* series, Kwan Hak-Hing (in *pinyin*, Guan Dexing), was a Guangzhou native he apparently got the role because Wu was impressed by his reputation as an *aiguo yuwen*, or 'Patriotic Artist'.⁶⁵ I would be labouring a point if I were to pursue the diasporic background of the creative agents in the *Wong* series further. I will resist that temptation and concentrate on the films' expression of sinicist melancholia instead. This entails recasting Yu's concept of *wu de* for understanding the *Wong* series.

According to Yu, *wu de* – which the Kwan/Wong Fei Hong persona both possesses and embodies – refers to a code of ethics for martial artists.⁶⁶ Basically the code dictates that *wu shu* (martial arts) be used for building physical health and spiritual character, and for self-defence only, with recourse to violence as a last resort. At the same time the martial artist has a moral duty to protect the weak and the oppressed, and the *wu de* code also promotes the virtues of Confucian patriarchal ethics (for example, filial piety). All this rests on clear-cut distinctions between good and evil, distinctions which give the *Wong* series its characteristic moralist tone, a tone which, for me, is central to sinicist didacticism and symptomatic of sinicist melancholia.

Set in an idealized, self-contained world, the *Wong* series was rooted in nostalgia and was itself productive of a 'back to basics' master-narrative that turned to the past for sources of identity, agency and community.⁶⁷ Precisely because this master-narrative needed to come to terms with what it perceived as a loss of identity, a lack of agency and an absence of community in the present, the recourse to a mythical past was as much about reaffirming 'pure' and 'transcendental' Chinese traditions as it was about providing fantasy solutions to present losses. This accounts in part for the films' didacticism (their stress on the importance of Chinese traditions, their cogency and coherence). It also partly explicates the characteristic timeless milieu of the series.

Guzhuang films were commonly given a timeless milieu, especially those Cantonese swordplay pictures and opera films contemporaneous with the *Wong* series. Heroes or heroines in swordplay movies would typically retreat from human society to live in mountains, valleys or caves, where they would submit themselves to arduous martial training, often for years on end. There, nothing could interfere with

their determination. Their goal was singleminded: to exact revenge on those who had wronged them, or to become an invincible justice-fighter. Meanwhile very little change occurs in the 'outside' world, as if it is holding its breath, awaiting their return. Opera pictures, on the other hand, characteristically told stories about the romantic or tragic but always transcendental love between the scholar and the beauty. All these themes had the effect of repressing history as a narrative component.

The repressed history and timeless milieux of such films, including the *Wong* series, served to contain the dislocated history of diasporic people. The films denied the existence of an external world. This denial corresponds with Ackbar Abbas's notion of 'an ethos of exclusion' in old Cantonese films (prior to the 1970s) which characteristically defined homogenous social space in which foreigners and foreign elements had no place.⁶⁸ For me, such exclusion reflects less xenophobia than sinicist melancholia. The timeless world of the *Wong* series (and of *guzhuang* films in general) wanted nothing to do with a world that could not ensure the stability and security of sinicist cultural norms. For this reason, the problems of dealing with, say, the aggressive forces of western modernity and imperialism that emerged around the time of the actual Wong Fei Hong were completely ignored in the *Wong* series (though not in Tsui Hark's [in pinyin Xu Ke] remakes in the 1990s).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ackbar Abbas 'The new Hong Kong cinema and the *deja disparte*', *Discourse: Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* vol. 16 no. 3 (1994), p. 69.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of Tsui's remakes see Tan, *Dangerous Encounters* pp. 212–20. See also Kwai-Cheung Lo, 'Once upon a time technology comes to presence in China', *Modern Chinese Literature* vol. 7 no. 2 (1993), pp. 79–96.

The *Wong* series is thus characterized by the performance of didactic instructions, construed as timeless, against a backdrop of equally timeless spectacles, whether customs (ancestral offerings), habits (frequenting tea-houses and keeping pet-birds) or rituals (dragon boat races and lion dances). These are constructed as essentially Chinese (for some, Cantonese), and are depicted as having existed since time immemorial. In conflating tradition with nationalism (and vice versa), these films invoked, as much as they reinforced, sinicist claims of cultural coherence. The escapism which the *Wong* milieu afforded was a mark of sinicist melancholia precisely because it blocked out modern time in order to uphold an idea/ideal of country, culture and traditions (including *zuguo juxiang*) as outside time and therefore beyond the reach of historical forces. The *Wong* series became a continual staging of the sinicist past which, in obliterating the present, melded past and future so that the future – if it was worth pondering at all – was the past. Herein lay the imaginary realm of sinicist melancholia in which traditional Chinese morals, habits and customs would, and must, prevail. This marked a stark contrast to belligerent sinicism which, in its relentless pursuit of modernity, actively sought first to sever the present from the past and then to connect that severed present to the future.

The kindest cut: functions and meanings of music video editing

CAROL VERNALLIS

When critics of film and television say that something is 'cut like music video' or refer to 'MTV-style editing', what do they mean? They might mention quick cutting or editing on the beat, and indeed one can see that the edits in music video come far more frequently than in film, that many stand out as disjunctive, and that the editing seems to have a rhythmic basis closely connected to the song. These last two features of music video editing – that it is sometimes meant to be noticed and that it brings out aspects of the song – suggest at once that it does something different, and perhaps something more, than does the editing in film. Music video editing bears a far greater responsibility for many elements than does classic Hollywood film editing. Not only does the editing in a music video direct the flow of the narrative, it can underscore non-narrative visual structures and form such structures on its own. Like film editing it can colour our understanding of characters, but it has also assimilated and extended the iconography of the pop star.

Much of the particularity of music video editing lies in its responsiveness to the music. It can elucidate aspects of the song, such as rhythmic and timbral features, particular phrases in the lyrics, and especially the song's sectional divisions. Because it can establish its own rhythmic profile, the editing can provide a counterpoint to the song's rhythmic structures. More subtly and also most importantly, the editing in a music video works hard to ensure that no single element (the narrative, the setting, the performance, the star, the lyrics, the song) gains the upper hand. Music video directors rely on the editing to maintain a sense of openness, a sense that any

1 Theorists like Roman Jakobson have noted that in classic Hollywood film all elements – lighting, editing, music – become subsumed in the narrative which functions as the dominant through-line. See Roman Jakobson, *Readings in Russian Poetics* (Cambridge MA MIT Press 1971), pp 82–7. In music video on the other hand, the narrative is only one element among many: any parameter can come to the fore, grab our attention and then quickly recede from view. We do notice the editing in Hollywood films but only rarely, for example during a frenetic action sequence or at the heightened moment when the camera peers down a gun barrel.

I refer to classical Hollywood editing in its most generic Bordwellian sense: see David Bordwell and Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1985). There are, of course, a number of directors who highlight editing as a stylistic feature, such as Leone or Peckinpah, and those who break the rules, like Dreyer and Ozu. Music video editing has influenced contemporary filmmaking to the extent that the border between media has become less distinct.

I do not intend to minimize the ways that editing contributes to a narrative film's organization and its effect on spectators. See Ayako Saito, 'Hitchcock's trilogy: a logic of mise en scène' in Janet Bergstrom, *Endless Night* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press 1999), pp 200–249.

Editing tends to be an undertheorized area of film studies. The most significant texts on film editing are Karel Reisz, *The Techniques of Film Editing* (Boston MA: Focal Press 1988) and Ken Dancyger, *The Technique of Film and Video Editing* (Boston MA: Focal Press 1996).

2 David Bordwell notes that graphics rhythm space and time then are at the service of the filmmaker through the

element can come to the fore at any time. The editing does so in part simply through being noticed. By demanding attention, it prevents powerful images from acquiring too much weight and stopping the flow of information. The editing thus preserves the video's momentum and keeps us in the present. A striking edit can allow one to move past a number of strange or disturbing images while neither worrying about them nor forgetting them completely.¹

Music video's complexity stems not only from the sheer number of functions it serves, but also from the way that it moves unpredictably among these functions. It may be helpful to picture the succession of images in a video, and the edits that join them, more as a necklace of variously coloured and sized beads than as a chain. This picture not only emphasizes the heterogeneity of shots in music video, but also suggests the materiality of the edit itself. Indeed, sometimes the edit seems to function as a part of the image and sometimes as a gap.

This essay is divided into five sections: (1) an introduction to the grammar of shots and edits, and a discussion of how their functions differ between film and music video; (2) an analysis of the role of editing in making meaning, creating narrative, and establishing other forms of continuity; (3) an explanation of how music video image adapts to the processual nature of sound; (4) an examination of the ways that music videos treat closeups of the star; and (5) a presentation of the means by which editing can reflect musical features. Because it deciphers types of shots and edits, this essay functions as a grammar for music video editing; however, it also contains a theoretical component. I argue that the edits in music video mean something different – and create meaning differently – than do their filmic counterparts. Even when a shot and edit in a music video remind one of classic narrative film, their function may have undergone a change of valence. Music video editing, like camera movement and camera placement, enables relations between the song and the image.

Shots and edits

When constructing a taxonomy of shots and edits in music video, one can begin with traditional narrative film practices. The continuity system forms the basis of film editing but is much less common in music video. Common continuity edits in film include the 180-degree rule, which preserves screen direction, as well as the thirty-degree rule, which prevents a jump-cut between two shots, and also shot/reverse-shots, over-the-shoulder shots and matches on actions.² Such edits attempt to naturalize the movement from shot to shot and render the break as seamless as possible. Continuity editing seeks to preserve the flow of time and the coherence of spaces. The ultimate

technique of editing Yet most films we see make use of a very narrow set of editing possibilities – so narrow indeed that we can speak of a dominant editing style throughout Western film history The purpose of the system [continuity editing] was to tell a story coherently and clearly, to map out the chain of characters actions in an undistracting way David Bordwell *Film Art* (New York McGraw-Hill 1987) pp 284–5

3 Music videos seldom present a clear path through their structure Sustained sequences of pure cross-cutting are rare (the classic example is a shot of a man on a horseback racing to the train then the speeding train then back to the man on horseback) as is a figure chasing another in a single shot More levels of activity may be necessary to underscore the heterogeneous quality of the song At first glance the Clash's 'Rock the Casbah' seems like a simple chase – Egyptians chase Israelis A closer examination of the video reveals that the armadillo that runs at the bottom of the frame complicates the relations among the figures and the music

goal of continuity editing is to create a single, clear path through a film's world. Because music videos seem to benefit from providing a multiplicity of incomplete, sometimes obscure paths, continuity editing will serve different functions and govern only isolated sections of a video.³ Perhaps music videos avoid continuity editing because such techniques would give the visual track too strong a forward trajectory the image might seem to overtake the song A music video's aim is to spark a listener's interest in the song, to teach her enough about it that she first remembers the song and second, purchases it. Music video's disjunctive editing keeps us within the ever-changing surface of the song Though such edits may momentarily create a sense of disequilibrium, they force the viewer to focus on musical and visual cues, allowing her to regain a sense of orientation In addition, the dense, oblique quality of a string of imagery can serve to showcase the star. The viewer may experience a jolt of accomplishment and pleasure as she passes through a thicket of imagery to come upon a clearing where she finds herself alone with a closeup of the performer One of the most narrative music videos, Aerosmith's 'Janie's Got a Gun', comes the closest to following the rules of traditional Hollywood continuity, yet it also extends and breaks these rules. The video concerns incest and, at one point, the father stands at the threshold of his daughter's room while the mother watches. In this sequence, sightlines do not match. Consequently, it will take a while for the viewer to notice that, based upon the position of the characters, the mother is watching the father, yet he does not see her. In addition, the thirty-degree rule is violated between the medium and closeup shots of the father. (The camera angle between shots is narrower than thirty degrees, and the object in the frame appears to jump) Music videos avoid matches on action, often extending or abbreviating a shot to give the sense of a cut in the 'wrong place' This effect blunts narrative progress and creates a rhythmic emphasis on the moment when the edit occurs. (Figure 1)⁴

4 Videos establish a sense of continuity on the surface partly by using dissolves Smoother than cuts, dissolves provide a fuzzy articulation, rather than a sharp one against the song They do not therefore require a strong rhythmic commitment to a single musical feature

Director David Fincher's background is in graphic art In an interview, he told me that when he shot music videos he deliberately avoided learning the information commonly taught in film schools He believed he would make more interesting work by not sharing a common background with other filmmakers

It will be helpful to widen our consideration of editing techniques to include not only those of classic Hollywood films, but also those in the Russian formalist film tradition Karl Reisz's description of Eisenstein's *October* works as a characterization of music video editing.

Indeed, as a piece of narrative, [*October*] is extremely unsatisfactory. The incidents are loosely constructed and do not follow each other with the dramatic inevitability which a well-told story demands. we are not, for instance, shown Kerensky's character through a series of dramatically motivated episodes but through a number of random incidents, each suggesting a further aspect of Kerensky's vanity or incompetence. The time relationship between consecutive shots and scenes is left undefined and no



Figure 1
Aerosmith, 'Janie's Got a Gun'

sense of continuous development emerges: the cut from [shots] 108 to 109, for example, takes us – without reason or explanation – from the Czar's study to a staircase somewhere in the palace. No attempt is made to explain or to conceal the time lapse between the shots, as could easily have been done with a dissolve.⁵

5 Reisz, *The Technique of Film and Video Editing*, p. 35.

It seems intuitive that the Russian film formalists (precursors to the experimental filmmaking tradition) should share a lot with music video directors, but some of the reasons why this is so may not be immediately clear. We should remember that the early Russian film directors Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Eisenstein worked with minimal resources (film was so valuable that it was recycled for its silver) and they used almost no intertitles because they were making films for a largely illiterate public. Even though music video directors can command great resources in the era of late capitalist production, they too struggle with limitations. These limitations may seem trivial by comparison: music video is a short form; the music and lyrics may be banal; the singer must lip sync while the rest of the figures remain silent; much time must be spent showcasing the star. Like the early Russian filmmakers, they have to make the most of the brute materials of film, and to make frames and cuts as expressive as possible.

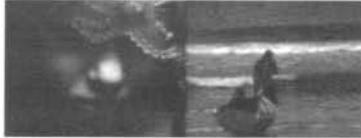
One kind of edit – graphic match – appears frequently in music video and Russian formalist films, but much less often in traditional narrative film. Such an edit joins two shots through shared compositional elements such as colour or shape, irrespective of content. In film, graphic matches are normally used to join scenes. Strikingly formal, they appear unnatural in most other contexts.

While we might see one or two graphic matches in the whole of a Hollywood narrative film, we often find two or three in a five-minute music video. Music video can use graphic matches so freely because the genre has reason to draw attention to its materials and production methods: the viewer can revel in an interesting edit, in a nice shape shared by two images, and in the cleverness of the director's and the

- 6** In a music video a graphic match will produce a momentary sense of surprise, a shock of recognition. This edit may take the viewer outside of the tape yet without skipping a beat, he or she will quickly become immersed again in the video's flow. The effect is similar to the small shocks that are associated with a sudden shift in colour, or a lyric that creates a jolting or disorienting effect. Narrative films use graphic matches much more sparingly, because they aim to enmesh the viewer in the constant unfolding of the narrative. To achieve this effect, editing should be as invisible as possible.

Figure 2

Peter Gabriel, 'Mercy St.'



- 7** 'The most elementary requirement of a smooth continuity is that the actions of two consecutive shots of a single scene should match — if a scene is shot from more than one angle, the background and positions of the players remain the same in each take. A more difficult aspect of the same problem is to keep the action and movement shown in consecutive shots accurately continuous. If an actor starts a movement — say he is half way through opening a door — in one shot, then that movement must be continued in the next from the precise moment it was left.' Reisz, *The Technique of Film and Video Editing*, pp. 216–17

one another; films will interpose a static shot when possible. When films cut between shots with motion, the editing tries to keep the viewer's eye in the same location to minimize the disjunctive effect.⁷ Only in action sequences or heightened dramatic scenes does the editing compel the viewer to shift focus rapidly from one edge of the frame to another. Music videos place movement against movement much more promiscuously, juxtaposing motion within the frame to camera movement, and mixing speeds, directions and durations. (Figure 3)

Unlike films, music videos frequently employ intentionally disjunctive edits. A jump-cut, which is generally unacceptable in film, can be avoided by shifting the camera at least thirty degrees between two adjacent shots that contain a change in scale. The jump-cut makes us feel that we are lurching forward or back. This kind of edit has been much discussed since its occasional deliberate use in films of the French new wave. (Figure 4) Music videos use jump-cuts liberally, along with a variety of other disjunctive edits. There are brusque edits that demand attention through a drastic shift in scale, colour or content. Sometimes we see an even stronger edit, one so clearly aestheticized that it separates itself from the flow of

Figure 3
Janet Jackson, 'Love Will Never Do (Without You)'





Figure 4
Alanis Morissette, 'You Oughta
Know'

the video. This edit might contain a roughened edge (say, a bit of film leader and a white flash sandwiched between the shots) that makes it work like a jump-cut.

It is also important that videos can create confusion about what is an edit and what is not. There are many ways to produce a meaningful articulation, both in camera and through post-production: the lens can continually change focal planes, or an element of the frame can pop forward, almost as though there had been an edit that affected only part of the frame. When other effects help to do the work of the editing in a video (defocusing, fading to black, strobing) the editing can perform other roles, such as creating an aesthetically pleasing visual line, or drawing the viewer's attention to the music. (Figure 5)



Figure 5
REM, 'Losing My Religion'

Just as editing changes in the shift from film to music video, so does the function of shots. Music videos and Hollywood films share a basic premiss: that visual information can best be communicated by cutting between three kinds of shot – long, medium and closeup. One can describe these shots according to the relation each establishes between the figure and the space around him. In long shots, the space obtains a greater prominence than the figure; in medium shots, the relation is roughly equivalent; and in closeups, the figure dominates the space. Hollywood film has virtually standardized the cropping of the figures in these shots. Most textbooks recommend that the proportion of the figure to the space in the frame falls within set guidelines to achieve a sense of balance: if too much or too little space surrounds the figure, a shot is said to look awkward. Further, the camera should not frame the body in such a

⁸ See Gerald Milterson. *The Technique of Television Production* (Boston, MA: Focal Press, 1999) p. 99.

way that the frame's edge passes through a join of the body, like the neck, elbows, knees or ankles.⁸ Music videos do not follow these rules. Not only is the relation between figure and space frequently off kilter, but the camera bisects the figure in places that would be unacceptable for classic Hollywood film. In film, the framing helps to draw attention to the content of a shot, rather than its composition, and to render the editing process invisible. The framing in music video makes us as aware of the edge of the frame (and of what we cannot see) as of the figure itself. This kind of framing can give a shot a precarious quality that the succeeding shot cannot always put right. In this way, the image moves forward, matching the momentum of the music. (Figure 6)



Figure 6

Janet Jackson

Nirvana

Mariah Carey

Viewers still learn the grammar of traditional shots from watching films and television. Music videos make use of these shots, but give them different functions and meanings. Our knowledge of film and television practices still provides a reference point, and can lend excitement to a shot in a music video that violates the rules of these practices. In Hollywood films, the extreme long-shot frequently serves to set the context for a new scene or to adopt a character's point of view. Such a shot might appear at any point in a music video as a way of exposing a space otherwise revealed only in fragments or of creating visual contrast. It may even help us to listen past the song's foreground elements to acknowledge the totality of its sound space. The absence or oblique presentation of master shots in music video means that the viewer does not own or know fully the space, but is taken through it. The closeup, in classic Hollywood film, will disclose something intimate about a character. In music video, the closeup can work similarly to showcase the star, but just as often it serves to underscore a lyric, a musical hook or the peak of a phrase. It may even be chosen simply to fit a pattern of shots already established within the edited sequence. In general, Hollywood cinematography's language of confrontation plays a greatly

diminished role in music video. Over-the-shoulder shots, separation shots and the 180-degree rule tend to make the relations between figures clear and specific in a way that would be inappropriate for most videos.

The use of camera angles can tell us much about the visual language of music video. Low-angle shots are used more extensively in music videos, partly because they reproduce the relations among audience, performer and stage. Such shots confer authority upon performers and assert their sexual charisma, often crudely, by highlighting the erogenous zones of performers. High-angle shots in music video, as in film, give the viewer a sense of power and mobility. (Figure 7) These shots perform other functions in videos. Sometimes an overhead or extremely high-angled shot is edited in to create a rhythmic unison with a key moment in the music, like the crest of a melody. Classic Hollywood film employs high-angle and low-angle shots sparingly; the camera quickly returns to a level perspective. A music video, by contrast, may contain a long series of high-angle or low-angle shots. When high- and low-angle shots are mixed together to form a series, the video will lack a sense of ground. The viewer turns to the music for additional spatial-temporal cues.



Figure 7
Guns N' Roses, 'November'

Traditionally, in forms such as Hollywood film, opera, the stage and oratory, the singer is placed in the centre and on a level field as a means of establishing centrality, stability, importance and clarity. When the singer is placed off centre (through framing, and so on) we might assume a different experience of the song. It is important to note that many music videos have parodied or deconstructed proscenium framing, for example in Nirvana's 'In Bloom', the band performs before an Arabian Nights backdrop for an Ed Sullivan Show. The scene is particularly humorous because the set was shot with low-resolution black and white video and the men, wearing skirts, quickly proceed to destroy it. Music videos often contain a long series of low- or high-angle shots which create a different relation between listener, music and image. For example, when there

is a long series of medium, low-angle shots (so that the performer appears from the waist up) as well as with an image that lacks stability – for example, with both camera movement and movement within the frame – one may have the sense that the song buoys the performer. In music video, there is no clear causality concerning which came first, music, lyrics or image, and at any moment, any one medium can be seen to influence the other. In this case, the performer is no longer the unambiguous source of the song. It can seem almost as if the image floats above and is carried by the music, literally as if sonic waves passed along the bottom of the screen, and the image bobbed up and down accordingly.

Camera movement in music video also differs from that of film. Most music videos make such extensive use of the dolly that a static shot seems anomalous. The dolly shot keeps the video moving; it starts almost invariably as soon as a video begins, and only ceases towards the end. It provides a simple way for a video to match and sustain a song's momentum. Director Marcus Nispel says that his work derives its musicality from a clever deployment of the dolly. He employs the dolly to create what he calls 'moves within moves' – the simultaneous use of tracking and panning.⁹ Nispel sometimes uses this scheme while a figure turns in the frame. (Figure 8) He thereby interposes three types of motion into one shot. A more common scheme places the artist at the centre of a circular track. The camera, often positioned at a low angle, moves back and forth along the track at various speeds. This scheme can create the sense of a performance space in almost any setting, while the low-angle and varied speeds give the camera a responsive, even performerly character. Videos can present a number of dolly shots edited together in order to build towards key moments in the video.

One type of music video camera movement that contrasts with the continuity editing system is the tracking shot. It is a camera

⁹ Interview with director, summer 1997



Figure 8
Amy Grant, 'House of Love'

movement whose meaning shifts when used in music video rather than in film, and is often used for special emphasis, frequently dominating a segment towards the middle of the song and punctuated by a few dissolves. Tracking shots play a crucial role in music video because they provide relief from a typically shallow sense of space. (In videos, we almost never pierce the background or stray far from the star.) The movement of the camera provides a change in point-of-view: instead of experiencing the music from a stationary position, as it rushes past, the viewer can get the sense of running alongside the soundstream. The tracking shot embodies perfectly the music video's attempt to match the energy of the song, to approach the song's rhythmic drive, even if the music remains just out of reach. The tracking shot can also constitute a distinct rhythmic stratum which will go in and out of synchronization with the song's other rhythmic strata. (Figure 9) Other kinds of camera movement function similarly. Cranes, pans, tilts and dramatic framings are usually done by hand and can achieve the intimate effects associated with handheld camera work. These shots provide possibilities for textural detail and subtle expressive nuance. They can also mimic the ways that sound approaches and fades away.

Figure 9
Michael and Janet Jackson,
'Scream'



Different types of shots and edits can be mixed to create variety, and although one gets the sense that any shot can follow any edit, some shots and edits are particularly complementary. An edit or camera move can anticipate a gesture in the shot that follows. A tracking shot can complement a subsequent shot of a strutting figure. A crane shot that starts low and rises through the space seems to match a figure reaching outward. A brusque edit works well preceding a shot that contains a series of sharp rhythmic gestures performed by the dancer or musician. Videos can create this kind of play simply between shots and edits, almost irrespective of what a shot contains. A dissolve can pair nicely with a tracking shot, and the effect of a jump-cut can be extended by an unbalanced shot. This isomorphism or exchange of gestures and shapes teaches the viewer to move fluently from parameter to parameter while watching a video. Such movement can occur across many parameters, leading the viewer directly into the structure of the song. In pop music, materials are commonly shared among different domains, for example, a melodic line in the voice will be taken up by the guitar, though the rhythmic values may be expanded. The drums will be

performed 'out of the pocket' (off the beat) to showcase breaks in a singer's voice.

The syntax of shots in music video, taken as a whole, is less conventionalized than that of shots in film. In the traditional Hollywood film scene, the camera begins at a distance and gradually moves in – from long or master-shots to two-shots and medium-shots, to closeups like separation and over-the-shoulder shots. We seem to learn more about the film's world and the characters' inner lives as we narrow our focus in this way. The music video camera shifts more freely among types of shots. Since a shot decision is made partly according to the form of the music and the pattern established by preceding shots, the search for knowledge about people and places takes second place. One cannot construct a typical shot order for music video. One might thrill at a twirling overhead-shot that appears two-thirds into the video. In retrospect, the viewer will realize that this is a good choice within the structure of the video; however, while viewing the tape, he would not have been able to predict the appearance of the shot. Unlike films, music videos do not divide neatly into scenes. The song's sectional divisions provide a stronger basis for parsing a video. If one had to generalize about the syntax of music video image, one might take the musical phrase as the most significant unit. Music videos typically present segments of six to nine shots that last roughly the length of a musical phrase. While the beginnings and ends of these segments do not always align with those of musical phrases, they can be recognizable to a viewer because they contain internal repetition and often possess a kind of symmetry. (Figure 10)



Figure 10
Metallica, 'Enter Sandman'

Meaning, narrativity and continuity

How does music video image create meaning and in what ways does editing contribute to that creation? The meanings of music videos have been thought to present a puzzle. Most often, music video image is relatively discontinuous. Time unfolds unpredictably and without clear reference points. Space is revealed slowly and

incompletely. A video will hint at a character's personality, mood, goals or desires but will never fully disclose them. We seldom see an action completed – a figure's movement is often cut off by the edit. Stories are suggested but not given in full. Nor can the lyrics tell us what we need to know – they may be banal or purely conventional. A famous performer can also pull at the video's meaning – we cannot tell beforehand how or to what extent our knowledge of a star is intended to come into play in a given video.

Music video editing plays an interesting role in producing this effect of discontinuity. The editing in Hollywood film seeks to fill the gaps in our knowledge, to stabilize the meaning of an image. In music video, the editing seems rather to help create the discontinuity and sense of lack. If, as I have suggested, editing constitutes a distinct visual parameter of music video, we should expect that it can contribute to the creation of discontinuity. Since it, too, reveals things incompletely, makes promises it does not keep, it should be understood as but one of the elements fighting for attention in a video. And the case becomes more complicated: edits happen between images, they are not part of the image. Edits can literalize the discontinuity by making us aware of the space between images.

Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics*, writes about the pleasure of reading into incomplete images.¹⁰ He celebrates the interpretive work needed to transform black and white lines or spots of colour into meaningful characters. Music video images can provide the same pleasure. We know very little about the figures we see, but we still attempt to make sense of them, based on how they look and what they are doing, as well as the setting, the lyrics and the music. We must decide whether a figure functions as a character or merely as part of a tableau vivant. Extending the notion of the reader's share in the interpretation of the image, McCloud discusses the gap between panels of the comic. In this gap, the reader calculates the amount of time elapsed, the distance traversed, and any change in the figures. The edits in music videos work similarly. Partly by attending to the song, the viewer decides what has happened in the cut from one shot to another. The disjunctive force of the edit compels this decision: how do these two shots relate? On what basis does the edit link them together? And what is the net effect of these disjunctions on the video as a whole?

A video like Marilyn Manson's 'Beautiful People' highlights how difficult it can be to make sense of music video editing. Marilyn Manson first became known for a version of Eurythmics' spare synth-pop hit 'Sweet Dreams'. The Marilyn Manson version recast the song as a gothic metal dirge with a video that placed the androgynous singer in a decayed warehouse, wearing a variety of abject and incongruous costumes. 'Beautiful People', the band's next video, extended the gothic punk aesthetic of the first to encompass a much broader range of imagery and more serious themes. Where

¹⁰ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Northampton MA: Kitchen Sink Press, 1994).

¹¹ Christian Metz has noted that when we see a closeup of a gun on top of a bureau the image can be read as a sentence. Look this is a gun. David Bordwell similarly attentive to closeups remarks that when the camera focuses on a prop, we expect the film to make further use of it – in the case of the gun, for example, a shooting. Unlike classical Hollywood cinema music video possesses few ways to make an image stand out from the rest of the visual flow. We may reach a peak in a music video, but feel unsure about what has led us to this moment. As we pass through an assortment of images, it can be hard to tell which serve to foreshadow an event and which perform a more purely decorative function. Consequently, our commitment to thinking about future events becomes attenuated.

¹² The worm, as it dances at the edge of a precipice, seems highly marked, yet also, through its placement, tangential – a thrown-away object. Only after reflecting upon the tape as a whole, might the viewer notice how key the image is. The worm stands for the spinal chords that Manson steals from his victims.

'Sweet Dreams' played with and against the singer's rock iconography. 'Beautiful People' remakes him as a Faustian figure who, we find out, experiments on human and animal subjects in order to gain control of the masses. The video's theme emerges quickly and its plot can ultimately be pieced together. 'Beautiful People' tells its story at an unpredictable rate, however, complicating the narrative with imagery whose origin and function are difficult to determine. The opening shots of the video demonstrate the modus operandi of music video's particular narrativity – the suggestion of a narrative along with a clear indication that this narrative will proceed elliptically and be rendered only in fragments.

The video opens with fifteen rapid static shots, many of which show parts of a human figure, prostheses or medical appliances. (Figure 11) Beakers and electronic devices suggest a laboratory. A worm, in closeup, dangles from the edge of a shelf. The video's theme of Faustian mad science is clear enough, but the elements are rendered with such detail that they begin to suggest a narrative. But which elements will be elaborated narratively and which simply provide colour? The video does not let on. Videos generally seem unable to mark images as important or unimportant in the ways that film can.¹¹ The laboratory shots, which one might expect to return, are not really taken up. The worm never reappears, but it is echoed by images of boot laces and metal cables twisted around a microphone stand.¹² The remainder of the video never seems to take stock of this opening, but rather moves forward to present three



Figure 11
Marilyn Manson,
'Beautiful People'

types of material: shots of the singer; images of dancers on stilts; and shots of the other bandmembers, a crowd, or people with prostheses, all of whom are shown to serve as experimental subjects. These strands proceed unpredictably – we do not know which will appear when, nor whether a given appearance will provide any new information. The viewer will realize at the video's close that 'Beautiful People' concerns process: Manson grows creatures out of stolen body parts. Yet, the clues are scattered across different domains and embedded in a variety of locations.¹³

- 13 Often in music video each visual strand develops in isolation. It may be difficult to gauge when a particular strand will reappear or the degree to which it has changed during its absence. Each strand may contain clues that shed light on the performer, the supporting characters, or the general context. By piecing these clues together the viewer will gradually build a composite, if self-contradictory image of who the characters are and what they tend to do.

The visual strands in music video can bear some similarity to those in popular music. Popular music contains distinct sections, each of which develops in a manner different from that of classical Hollywood narrative. Towards the end of each song section the music may thicken intensify, or simply be used up – one cannot really say that a particular song section possesses a teleology. Though a verse chorus or bridge can be highly differentiated, it can also share materials and one might be tempted to say that some cross-fertilization has taken place as the song unfolds. Similarly each visual strand in a music video remains distinct from the other changes over time (though rarely in a narrative fashion) and becomes affected to some degree by the other strands. It is common in music video for one strand to take on a particular patch of colour prop or disposition from another. At some point both strands may return to their original identity yet by this point the viewer will have the sense that some sort of process has taken place and that the video is ready to draw to a close.

Claims that videos lack coherence centre on wildly disparate juxtapositions and abrupt changes of style or production values. As 'Beautiful People' suggests, however, the connection between shots is sometimes clear, sometimes obscure, and many of the most interesting juxtapositions lie in between: we can have a vague understanding of a connection, but be unable to specify its nature. Metallica's 'Unforgiven' provides another example of a video that borders on incoherence precisely because, at some moments, the shooting and editing work as they do in film. It takes place in an abstract space with richly textured surfaces of sooty black and grey. A little boy and an old man perform repetitive tasks which seem impossible to complete. The band is set off from these characters, although the tonality of their surroundings remains consistent with the rest of the video's settings. Separation shots of a traditional sort imply a relationship between figures, but the video provides no way to determine which is the best of several possibilities – are they grandfather and grandson, allegorical figures of youth and old age, or do they represent one subject as child and adult? The matter is complicated further by separation shots of the singer and the old man. (Figure 12) In a film, these shots would presuppose a relationship between the two figures. We would not expect such a connection between musician and non-musician in a video that isolates these figures spatially, but the style of the shooting and editing almost demands that we imagine one. What is remarkable about these two shots and the edit between them is that each exists within a separate discourse. The shot of the lead guitarist belongs to the language of documentary, the shot of the old man to allegorical painting, while the edit between them derives from the realm of narrative filmmaking. When one recognizes these three elements, one becomes aware of an unbreachable rift among different modes of expression.

That 'Unforgiven' compels a viewer to pose these questions explicitly already marks it as different from Hollywood Film. Very few videos allow these conventions to perform their traditional functions unnoticed, and seldom present two adjacent shots that resemble paired shots in Hollywood cinema: we are unlikely to see two characters gaze at each other so that the sight lines match, each character takes up the same amount of space in the frame, and we

Figure 12
Metallica, 'Unforgiven'



can identify both and understand what their gestures mean. When this happens, the viewer may feel a shock of recognition. She may think, 'This feels like a film!'. The same is true for paired shots that carry clear narrative implications in film. Imagine a suspenseful sequence in which one shot shows a protagonist approaching a door and the following shot shows the door from the protagonist's perspective. If we were to see this sequence in a music video, we would know to feel suspense, but we would be so relieved to see something familiar, that we might well experience a sense of increasing rather than decreasing certainty. These moments often work as a pastiche of cinema.

In both 'Beautiful People' and 'Unforgiven', the editing verges on inscrutability. A typical video contains a broad range of connections, with the clear and egregiously unclear connections appearing unpredictably. The particular quality of videos may derive from those juxtapositions in which there is obviously a connection, but from which something is left out. Such juxtapositions represent the middle of the continuum. We see successive shots of people, whom we can identify by type, in a single space, but the people do not acknowledge one another and we cannot determine their relation. Or we might see people in different places and be unable to tell whether they are meant to relate at all. We must often extrapolate from what the shots provide if we are to give meaning to a juxtaposition. The early Russian filmmakers understood that this kind of extrapolation was crucial to cinema and argued forcefully that the editing could actually create a meaning in situations where the shots could not themselves provide one. Kuleshov performed an experiment in which he paired shots of an actor and coffin, an actor and bowl, and an actor and children. The results showed that the meaning created by placing one shot next to another could be that of a proper emotion directed towards an object: these pairs seemed to signify, respectively, mourning the loss of a beloved, yearning for food, and enjoying children at play. In music video, adjacent shots often relate but loosely; when separated by dramatic edits, each image will seem enclosed within its own semantic realm. Even paired shots of figures often withhold something. Such pairs of shots can resemble the images in the Kuleshov experiment. In these cases, the affect of the song provides the context for the image. The music cannot define the meaning of objects, but it can surely suggest the animating desire that characters bear towards objects or others. We read emotions into

the image before us, and, with the help of the song, make connections between this image and others in the video. (Figure 13)



Figure 13
The Tony Rich Project, 'Nobody
Knows'

Eisenstein gave the word montage a special sense, to signify the way in which two shots edited together could create a new meaning that could not inhere in either shot alone. Eisensteinian montage, like the Kuleshov experiment, is predicated on an absence or incompleteness of meaning, but it establishes connections based on conceptual relationships. In a famous sequence from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), a ship's cannon fires, accompanied by shots of a stone lion reclining, crouching and standing upright, signifying the uprising of the proletariat against the Czar. Bazin notes that montage disappeared from cinema when sound arrived, to be replaced by the seamless editing we now take for granted.¹⁴ One can see how the silent image track of music video might lend itself to montage. Montage occurs with some frequency in videos, but the collision rarely creates more than a mildly humorous or clever effect. (If montaged images possessed the force that Eisenstein expected of them, they might detract from the song.) In Don Henley's 'The End of the Innocence', two girls, about sixteen and seven, sit alone in a movie theatre. We can see the projectionist's light behind them, and on the screen we see a shot of a train with people sitting as passengers and the cropping of the shot makes the image look like a strip of film. (Figure 14a) In Nine Inch Nails's 'Closer', the eel stands in for a phallus. (Figure 14b)

¹⁴ Andre Bazin argues in *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 34, that the use of the graphic match atrophied once sound became used in film. He notes that the shots of women talking and then chickens clucking in Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936) is a hold-over from silent filmmaking.



Figure 14a
Don Henley, 'The End of
the Innocence'



Figure 14b
Nine Inch Nails, 'Closer'

The precarious relation of shot to shot, and the varied bases for this relation, affects a video's larger structures of meaning. The polysemic image track creates expectations it frequently leaves unfulfilled; we do not always know where – or how – a video is going. Films teach us to assume that we gain information as the narrative progresses, that we move steadily closer to revelation. Music videos work within this assumption but play against it by progressing haltingly and unpredictably, and by contradicting what has already been shown. Videos also draw us away from the

narrative by foregrounding other structures (especially formal and musical ones) and fulfilling other responsibilities (as to the star). We will therefore be unable to guess, as the video unfolds, whether a given shot will bear heavily, somewhat or not at all on a video's narrative. If narrative fulfillment does come, it will be at a time and in a form that cannot be predicted. This kind of expectation and interrogation of individual shots can suggest the way that videos build larger structures. The relationships between shots have more varied bases in music video than in film: they can relate not only because they present the same character, object or location but also because they share projection values, a lighting and colour scheme, a sense of scale or the use of a camera position. A single shot gives only an incomplete representation of that feature which makes it stand out, whether a character or a colour scheme. Successive appearances of this feature – even if not contiguous – therefore form a structure of partial revelation in which some questions are answered while new ones are asked. Indeed, the relation between non-contiguous shots linked by a single feature is unexpectedly potent in music video, sometimes closer than the connection between adjacent shots. Larger structures made of half-a-dozen or so shots, irregularly spaced and connected by the way they treat some visual parameter, play an important role in creating continuity. A music video can interlace several of these structures, which, like adjacent shots, may be unified by disposition of the figure, shape, colour, setting, theme and so on. It is important that they are not flat and featureless. They manifest changes of intensity as they unfold. A value may increase and decrease, in the case of colour, light, size, speed, height or depth; if we are considering plot, location or character development, it is the amount and nature of revelation that will vary. Some of these structures contain a shot that can function as a high or low point. The high points sometimes form tears in the musical-visual texture (by jutting out above an established level of intensity). This effect is momentary, and afterwards a viewer may quickly invest attention in some aspect of the song's texture in an attempt to prolong the moment of intensity. This prolongation takes place in the instant after the high point has been reached but before the cut to the next shot. The song can provide something to latch onto – a melodic high point, a sectional division, or the entrance of a new timbre. This musical feature takes on new meaning, in this heightened moment, which it carries into its subsequent occurrences. One may consider the feature's history, and in retrospect, invest it with a special meaning. The structures formed according to principles of graphic match are particularly interesting. One might be tempted to call these irregularly spaced graphic matches 'visual rhymes', since a match interrupted by a group of shots that do not share the feature held in common by the two matched shots, carries a chime of recognition and creates a momentary sense of completion.

Nirvana's 'Come As You Are' connects shots according to graphic similarities. Each of these shots contains an oblong shape with appendages, and, in tandem with the music, suggests a stunting of potential. (Figure 15)

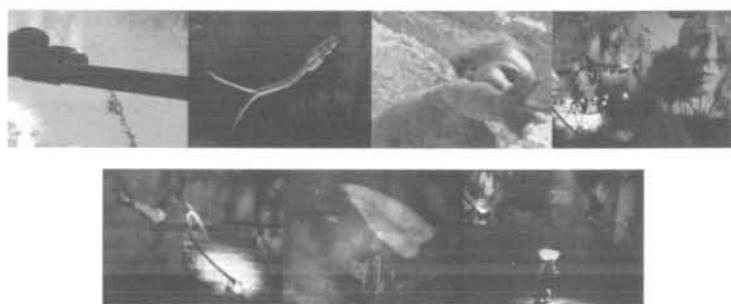


Figure 15
Nirvana, 'Come As You Are'

Editing and the experience of image and sound

I suggested earlier that music video editing exceeds the functions of film editing largely through its responsiveness to musical features – rhythmic, timbral, melodic and formal. I would like now to expand on this suggestion. When early discussions of music video mentioned music-image connections, they tended to notice simple rhythmic correspondences: 'cutting on the beat'. In order to show that the connections between the editing and the music of music videos can be more subtle and more various than this, it will be helpful to take a step back and consider those elements of music video image – crucial, in my view – that reflect the experiential properties of sound. This deep connection between image and song in music video allows for the responsiveness of editing and other visual parameters to musical features.

Theorists such as Edward Branigan, Michel Chion and Walter Ong have reminded us that sound and image possess different properties. Sounds ebb, flow and surround us.¹⁵ The cinematographic features and mise-en-scene of music video – extreme high, low and canted angles, long tracking-shots, unusual camera-pans and tilts, and the lively features within the frame, glittering surfaces, rippling light – can mimic sonic processes. The types of shots used in videos do not just reflect sonic processes, they also suggest a listening subject as much as a viewing one. We actually see figures turning, as if to listen, towards people and objects in the space. The camera's perspective often suffices to imply a listening subject. In order best to see something we might want to be placed squarely before it. If we want to listen attentively to a sound, however, a frontal position is unnecessary. Many positions may be satisfactory – above, below, off to the side. In fact, turning an ear towards the object will take

¹⁵ Edward Branigan, 'Sound and epistemology in film', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, no. 47 (Fall 1989) pp. 312–24
Michel Chion, *Audiovision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technology of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1985).

our eyes away from it. One of the most common camera positions in music video – below the subject and to one side – may privilege listening over viewing and grant greater authority to the soundtrack than to the image. The camera in music video also seems to mimic the ways that we direct our attention in a sonic space. We can throw our attention to focus on a sound that interests us. When we shift our focus among various sound sources in our environment, we experience a greater sense of mobility than viewing offers. The kinds of shots and editing that we see in music video – jumping from one location to another even before an image catches our eye – resemble what we do when we listen.

The camera normally takes time to explore the extent of a video's setting, so that a setting is only partly revealed in any single shot. How does this practice influence our hearing of a song? A pop song creates a sense of a space through arrangement, production, mixing and mastering. The acoustical properties of this constructed musical space seldom seem to match that of the video's setting. This lack of fit creates some confusion and some interest. How could the song's soundworld inhabit the space of the video? The camera, as it explores the space, suggests possible ways that parts of the arrangement might be distributed within this environment. Many music videos exploit our curiosity about how a song might sound in the actual space of the music video: walls, floors and ceilings are placed at odd angles and covered with materials that imply specific acoustical properties; objects that resemble speakers and baffles may be distributed throughout the space. Despite the fact that the camera never quite reaches the sides or the back of the setting, these videos encourage us to imagine the sound waves rolling into the walls and bouncing off them, much like dye moving through water. (Figure 16)



Figure 16
Usher, 'Make Me Wanna'

If the very walls and furniture can seem to respond to the music, what of the figures we see interacting with it through dance and other, more subtle kinds of movement? Sounds can seem to come through or from them. But how? All gestures in music video – the flick of a wrist, the flickering of light, or the fluttering of fabric – become like dance. We use sound to register the interiority of objects, whether hollow or dense. The way that the camera in music video hovers over the figures, slowly taking in their bodies, may look pornographic, but it might also be a way to register the sounds emanating from these bodily sources. If we think of a singer's voice

as reflecting the rhythms of her body, and the instruments as extending the voice, then the camera can be thought of as creating a fantasy of what lies inside the body – the spring of the muscles, the heartbeat, the flow of blood.

To sell the band and the song, a video most often places the singer front and centre. Some of the time, however, figures begin to turn away from us and show us only crowns of heads, crooks of necks, and elbows. These parts of the body seem to carry as much authority as does the face, and any part that is turned towards us can seem to lead us into the music. Indeed, the figures do not look at each other so much as they turn receptively towards one another as if to listen. The singer remains perpetually in motion, turning sometimes to address us, sometimes towards the figures in the background. The supporting figures may continue to turn towards and away from us, helping thereby to continue the image's rotation. This continuity of motion works to maintain the flow of the image against that of the music.

The description that I have laid out thus far suggests that music video creates an experience more like listening than viewing. As such, it encourages some of the receptiveness and sense of connection that sound creates. Music videos draw us into a playful space where attractive objects are distributed across the visual field. In the absence of a strong narrative, videos have other means to maintain a viewer's engagement. The figures, the camera and the edits each find ways to participate, but they do not always work together harmoniously to achieve this goal – the three often fight amongst themselves for attention, with the song's formal and rhythmic structures as the stable ground. It does not matter, in a sense, whether an elbow comes forward, an edit occurs, a camera tracks, or a figure walks – all are felt as articulations against the music. The bodies of the figures are often the first element to engage us. Music video reveals the body as an enormous but incomplete surface. We may feel tempted to extrapolate beyond the edge of the frame in order to fill in the missing arms and legs. At the same time, the intense focus on a fragment of the body invests it with a special expressive weight. We can imagine feelings and desires – a thinking subject – by watching the rate of release in the shoulders or the spring of the hips. As the video unfolds, we piece together what we have seen to make the body whole. We might remember a longer shot of the body, perhaps torso to feet, a closeup of the head and neck, and a high-angle shot that captures the figure from above. The image also creates associations with the song, matching sections or other musical features with particular visual materials. We see the body bob up and down during the third verse of the song, say, and we might recall the way it moved during the previous verse. As the video progresses, features of the song become associated with elements of the image – a rhythmic motive with the swivel of the

performer's hips, a lilting instrumental melody with a character in the background. By recalling what we have seen and heard, we imagine a phantasmagorical body. (Figure 17) If a video gives us enough material to create a picture of one body, we can attribute moods to other characters in the space who have been rendered more partially, and who often have been chosen because their carriage and gestures are so different from those of the lead performers. As a video progresses, we participate kinaesthetically in the video. We compensate imaginatively for what we do not immediately see in the frame.



Figure 17
Mariah Carey, 'Honey'

The camera functions similarly to create the sense of a consciousness. It is silent and invisible, yet it moves so concertedly – searching, jogging back and forth – that we imagine these movements adding up to something like a narrative voice. As the song unfolds, we can try to guess what the camera is hearing and what it will follow next. The edits balance the camera's movement, keeping things on track. Almost like a downbeat, the edit creates a new beginning. The edits form patterns that the viewer can project into the future. Such patterns are formed by the camera and the body as well. The body, the camera and the editing thus build a kind of momentum that can carry the viewer through a video.

Along with those features that attract and hold our attention, music videos have several ways to keep us at bay. The moving camera and the patterns formed by edits are among the techniques that engage us. We are also engaged by the ever-changing surface of music video, in which a lyric might come to the fore at one point, then a closeup, followed by a striking edit, and then some hook in the music. The song's unfolding and the performers' movements may draw us in. Though music videos rarely contain fully-wrought stories,

they can interest us in a narrative by inciting curiosity about who the characters are and what they might do. Videos distance us in a variety of ways. The borders of the television screen block our entry into the visual space. The figures move obliquely against the music and do not speak; their gestures are abruptly cut off, so one never knows what the next shot will be, nor how the rest of the video will evolve. We may get the sense that the figures are not quite human but not fully emblematic. What animates them seems strange. It is almost like looking at an aquarium. The mechanisms that draw us forward and keep us at a distance exist in constant tension in music video. One may have an urge to follow the unfolding of the image and the music, to enter the space of the music video. One can also feel as though one is locked forever outside, looking in. The body seems restrained somehow, glued to the chair.

Showcasing the star

A focus on editing can help us to understand the relation between music video's star-making dimension and its modes of continuity and signification. Closeups of the star, and the ways they are edited into the flow of a video, provide useful cases to study. The music video closeup possesses its own rhetoric. It has developed a unique look, revealing each wrinkle of the brow and blink of the eyelid as if to capture every emotion crossing the face. Music videos break down visual, lyrical and musical elements to their smallest constituent parts. a prop, a colour, a gesture, a few words, an intriguing riff. In this light, the closeup can be understood to serve specific structural functions. Closeups can leave a viewer with just a face and a moment of the song, unlike actors in narrative film, who bear a past and future that press in on them as we view them in closeup, the music video performer stands in a kind of temporal isolation. As the face fills the frame, it is subjected to so much visual analysis that it seems to move very slowly, almost to suggest the song's slowest rhythmic stratum. This rhythmic effect can serve a grounding function. The closeup of the singer's face is often shot and edited in such a way as to leave us with a single gesture. In its abbreviated simplicity, this gesture suggests a way of grasping hold of some musical element, which might be the main hook or a small detail.

Music videos often present a flow of images that are too rich and materials that seem to dissolve too quickly. The closeup gives us something to commit to memory. The music seems to set certain faces in amber, preserved and just out of reach. The face becomes a mask, drawn into contortions we associate with the most hyperbolic silent screen acting – more an archetype than an expression of the performer himself. This intense isolation keeps the viewer in the present, blocking access to the past or the future as the music rushes

¹⁶ Rudolph Arnheim *The Power of the Center* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press 1988 pp 53–5)

by. The compositional features of the closeup, particularly the relation of the figure to the edges of the screen, contribute to this sense of the figure's being held in isolation. Rudolf Arnheim has taught us to recognize the force of the frame on the composition of a painting. He defines the balancing centre as the point around which the composition organizes itself. It is created by the configuration of vectors issuing from an enclosure such as the frame of a picture.¹⁶ One can liken this force or pressure from the frame upon the picture proper to that of the song upon the closeup of the star. Here the song drives toward the downbeat, the beginnings of phrases and sections, or the tonic chord. When a performer is shown in closeup moving a bit with the music, the music seems to buffet the figure, like rip tides pushing and pulling in different directions. One wonders whether the figure will hold position or be sucked into the centre.

This effect of a push and pull within an unyielding frame makes the closeup precarious. The moments of stability that closeups provide become high points of the video. The video brings us towards these peaks, holds us against them, and then releases us. Only a few moments of the video will provide this much pleasure, and as I, the viewer, reach for them they will be gone. As I watch a video and follow the song, I casually study the performer's body, just as I do when I look at models in magazines. I admire the lines of the jaw, the look in the eye, the light. Suddenly the performer's head turns towards me, the eyes gaze into mine, the singing voice demands my attention, and I am struck. Music can transgress both physical space and the borders of the body, changing our sense of time and of these boundaries themselves. At this moment, the performer crosses the limits of the screen and addresses me as a person, and I can no longer view this face and body as an object. Just as quickly, the head turns, the rhythm changes, the soul has gone, and again I am simply watching a blank human form.¹⁷

¹⁷ Earlier I noted that music can seem to leap across frames and link two shots together thereby connecting one character to another. In this example, the music seems to pierce the viewing plane and pour forth to envelop the viewer.

In the absence of a strong narrative, music video creates tension by varying basic visual materials, such as shots and edits. Much of music video editing consists in finding new relationships within space and amongst persons. When a video presents an alternation between shots that display a body and shots that emphasize the space around it, the body becomes the video's ground. One of the most sustained discussions in film theory concerns how a viewer is sutured into the diegesis of film through editing. A series of sightlines and shot/reverse-shots, most commonly, place the viewer in the position of the protagonist or the privileged onlooker. Music video, it seems to me, is much freer in terms of viewer identification and perspective. In the Backstreet Boys' 'Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely', the viewer's empathy switches from figure to figure simply because someone is within the frame and/or lip synching. Identification occurs quickly – within one or two shots. In the most

- 18** At certain moments in some music videos a parameter's first order function is to highlight musical structure and second to represent. If it serves as an articulation, it does not matter if we are flashed something illicitly sexual (a breast or a crotch), or something that is not (an elbow or an ankle). When elbow, breast, flash of light, hip, edit or buttock accentuate the beat or a timbre in the voice disjunctions start to blur as well as the boundary between gender and sexuality. Some of music video's intense pleasure may stem from a slide into a pre-Oedipal state one of abundance, repetition and polymorphous perversity.
- 19** Music video directors often covet particular editors. Marcus Nispel admires his editor's special sensitivity to the ways an edit falls on or off the beat, perhaps gained from years as a professional drummer. Music video editing demands skills not taught in film school.
- 20** While some types of shot and edit appear more frequently in some genres than others – a slow-mo low-angle long tracking-shot followed by a dissolve appears most frequently in rap – the language of shots and edits does not differ greatly from one musical style to another. Even in country videos (such as Shania Twain's 'You're Still the One'), the rhetoric remains within the same language. Neither has editing changed noticeably in music video's short broadcast history. While a number of early 1980s videos such as INX's 'What You Want' may not be as densely articulated as some videos of today, many of the same editing techniques and strategies are present. A study of editing based on genre, period or director would be fruitful. My analysis of Madonna's 'Cherish' provides a close reading of the editing in a single video. Carol Vernallis 'The aesthetics of music video: the relation of music and image in Madonna's "Cherish"', *Popular Music*, vol. 17 no. 2 (1998) pp. 153–87

extreme examples in music video, the viewer's empathy and identification moves between multiple elements in the frame. A series of shots can all contain movement on the beat – a bob of a head, a slap of a wrist, a raising of a glass, a throwing of a ball – and the viewer's attention will seem to skip across the surface like a skimmed stone, following the movements and feelings of everything that moves within the frame.¹⁸

Editing and the music of music video

Through its varied roles, editing loosens the representational functions filmed images traditionally perform, opening them up to a sense of polyvalent play. The editing thereby places the video's images and the song's formal features in close relation.¹⁹ I doubt the numerous ways that music and image can be put into one-to-one relations would surprise musicians or pop music scholars. Obviously, editing can reflect the basic beat pattern of the song, but it can also be responsive to all of the song's other parameters. For example, long dissolves can complement arrangements that include smooth timbres and long-held tones. A video can use different visual material to offset an important hook or a different cutting rhythm at the beginnings and ends of phrases. And, of course, these effects can switch from one-to-one relationships to something that is more contrapuntal.²⁰

Tempo is one feature readily taken up by music video editing. Music videos tend to underscore the most arresting features of a song, and if the song is striking for its sprightly rhythmic feel or its languorous, plodding tempo, the image will often unfold especially quickly or slowly – the image will seem actually to exceed the song's extreme speed. Green Day's 'Jaded/Brain Stew' is really two short, connected songs. During the slower first part, the video shows a tractor dragging a couch across a landfill in slow motion, along with shots of a dead horse and a sullen old man. The performers' lack of engagement enhances the sense of lassitude. When the music changes to a faster tempo for the second part of the song, the camera starts whipping around and the pace of the editing increases. The concentration of energy also derives from squeezing the performers into a small room and from using lurid, overheated colours.

(Figure 18)

The editing can draw our attention to the general contours of the song's phrase structure. Long takes underscore broad melodic phrases, while quick cutting is used to keep us focused on the beat of songs that emphasize smaller rhythmic elements. Maxwell's high, pure falsetto floats over the arrangement in his 'Ascension'. His singing suggests that he can extend the melodic line for measures on end. The video unfolds in a performance setting typical of music



Figure 18
Green Day 'Jaded/ Brain Stew'

video – a stark space with an enormous winged backdrop. The phrasing is reflected in two principal ways. Editing occurs very infrequently, especially while Maxwell sings. The breadth of the melodic line is also matched by the long strides of models in close-fitting metallic suits who walk resolutely towards the camera. (Figure 19a) The vocal hook for Tag Team's 'Whoomp, There It Is', on the other hand, is constructed of short, rhythmic vocal interjections. The camera correspondingly adopts a high-angle point-of-view over a crowd of dancers who vigorously bob up and down. The camera darts in and out over the dancers, while the editing serves to break up the camera movement. (Figure 19b) When the editing diverges from the rhythm of the song, the departure can serve a number of functions. In most pop songs, the beat pattern is omnipresent and easy to follow. When the editing moves from coincidence with the beat pattern to divergence, or vice versa, the effect can be keenly felt. Occasionally, editing off the beat can create a rhythmic counterpoint to the song's beat pattern. Prince's 'Gett Off' presents a high level of rhythmic complexity. The video contains cutting before and behind the beat, which establishes another rhythmic voice and brings out the cross-rhythms created by the figures' movements.

Editing can, of course, carry on two roles simultaneously, like reflecting musical features and shaping the meaning of the video. In Madonna's 'Oh, Father', the verse is sedate, and the editing occurs regularly, separated by long intervals. On the other hand, the chorus, which narrates the story of a child being tormented by her father, is much more tumultuous. The rapid editing occurs sporadically and off the beat, while Madonna's voice cracks, and the drums are 'out of the pocket'. Since the image, alone, in music video cannot narrate a story (figures cannot speak, the form is short, and time and place is rendered incompletely), the parameters must do the work of telling the tale. In this instance, the editing bears much of the brunt of

Figure 19a
Maxwell, 'Ascension'



Figure 19b
Tag Team, 'Whoomp,
There It Is'



describing Madonna's distress, and it also functions musically, underscoring both the jagged quality of her voice and the rhythm arrangement.

In the last example, the editing reflects musical structure and at the same time conveys meaning. But editing can perform even more sophisticated functions. First, I would like to describe the ways that, by emphasizing certain sounds and images, a filmmaker can provide a path through the image. In one scene from Jacques Tati's *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* (1953), vacationers relax at a resort hotel. In the foreground of the shot, some guests quietly play cards, while in the background, Hulot plays ping-pong. Early in the scene, the guests in the foreground are murmuring softly and Hulot's ping-pong game is louder. The sound encourages us to watch Hulot. As the guests become louder and we hear less of Hulot's ping-pong ball, our attention shifts to the front of the set. Let me now give a similar example from music video. In a video, our attention to the song shapes the way we perceive the image, but, to an equal extent, what we attend to in the image helps to determine how we hear the music. When a star jams his face in front of the camera, or when a hand or foot threatens to break through the viewing plane, we suddenly hear the music in a different way. We become aware that we should pay attention right now. If the same moment in the song were accompanied by a less assertive image – say, a long shot – we would more likely attend to the overall arrangement of the song than focus on any particular element. This experiment can work in reverse, with the music influencing our attention to the image. Imagine a scenario with two types of music. The first contains a city scene, shot in slow motion, with people walking down a busy street:

a medium-shot in slow motion is cropped so that we see the people from their knees to just above their eyebrows. Let us say that the song contains a pounding jungle beat and short synthesizer flurries. We might notice the intensity of the pedestrians' faces or the muscular armature of one or two people. On the other hand, if we hear a flowing synthesizer pad with a minimal rhythm arrangement, perhaps some innocuous 'CD jazz', we might attend instead to the spring and sweep of the bodies in motion, and to the flow of the crowd as a whole. Music videos frequently crop images like the example above, breaking bodies at the joint or rendering them partially, so that more of the context must be supplied by the music than by the image.

In music video, the musical or visual element with the sharpest profile tends to claim the viewer's attention. As a video unfolds, our attention shifts continually among music, image and lyrics, as each provides novelty at some point and then recedes into the background. A deployment of mixed shot sizes, some with very clear content, and some cropped so that they are vague or unspecific, can thus establish a path through the formal and timbral space of the song. The editing can even complicate the matter further by controlling the deployment of shots. Thus, as we move towards a moment of culmination in the song, the editing can tease us with the possibility of spoiling the peak moment's arrival, or feign disinterest by drawing attention to other features of the song. By anticipating what the song will do next, the image can create a sense of expectation. A change of shot sizes can also allow us to circulate within a musical parameter like rhythm or the arrangement. A viewer might first notice the music's smallest rhythmic value and then jump down one level to the basic quarter-note pulse. If one sees a long shot of performers in the background against an ornate curtain or a waterfall, one might attend to the microrhythms of the music. Imagine that the video cuts next to a medium shot in which the singer's face and chest are foregrounded and her head moves side to side, while she crosses and uncrosses her arms as if clapping to the music. The two shots together might encourage such a leap. The image can then serve as a guide to teach us about salient features of the song.

I hope I have provided a glimpse into the world of music video editing. As the video unfolds, the editing can shift rapidly in function, foregrounding musical structure, showcasing the star, reflecting experiential features of the sound, conveying meaning, and even constructing aesthetically pleasing visual strands in its own right. It is helpful, as one watches video, to be attentive to the way that the editing sometimes plays an equal role with other elements – such as colour, narrative, and the treatment of the star – that sometimes vie for attention and sometimes recede into the

background, and also to how editing will play a uniquely superordinate role, functioning as a switcher. Editing controls as it has traditionally served to control the order and duration of shots, and therefore helps to determine when and for how long another parameter will come to the fore.

The investigation of music video editing should be understood as one example of a kind of study that might be performed on any element. Such a study would acknowledge the field on which all elements interact, without forgetting that each has its own cultural history within and beyond music video, its own set of functions (traditional and non-traditional), and its own technical means. A group of these studies would allow us to appreciate music video as a discursive form without imposing a false unity or unjustly privileging one element over the others. When we follow the changing surface of a video, we can try to remember that a momentary effect that claims our attention is part of a structure that traverses the whole of the video, and that this effect is created within the context of that structure: it may mark the high point of some value or constitute a departure from a traditional role. If a video seems discontinuous, it is not because the image track consists of autonomous shots that do not relate to one another, it is because the video interlaces a number of such structures in an unpredictable way. The sheer density of this interlacing provides one of music video's greatest pleasures.

Thanks to the following companies for use of video stills

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Universal for Peter Gabriel, 'Mercy St.', Amy Grant, 'House of Love', Janet Jackson, 'Love Will Never Do (Without You)', Nine Inch Nails, 'Closer', Nirvana, 'Teen Spirit' and 'Come As You Are'
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Masculinities, generations, and cultural transformation in contemporary Tunisian cinema

MARTIN STOLLERY

This essay explores some representations of masculinities within North African cinema. Specifically, it focuses on how intergenerational, particularly father-son, relationships are represented within three examples of contemporary Tunisian cinema. Generational transitions, in which established notions of masculinity are perpetuated, modified or overtly contested, are central to the narrative structure of these films. In each one, diegetic musical performances are central to the spectator's understanding and enjoyment of the narratives and the issues they raise. The films in question are *Rih al-sadd/Man of Ashes* (Nouri Bouzid, 1986), *Asfour stah/Halfaouine* (Férid Boughedir, 1990), and *çount al-Quçour/Silences of the Palace* (Moufida Tlathî, 1994).

These films are important because of their esteem and popularity within North African and Middle Eastern film cultures. Each won the Tanit d'or, the top prize at the biannual Carthage Film Festival (the JCC/Journées Cinématographique de Carthage) in the year of its release.¹ Each, according to available reports, attracted large Tunisian and North African audiences.² They are significant cultural interventions which resonated meaningfully with spectators within these contexts. *Halfaouine* and *Silences of the Palace* have also been successfully exhibited on art cinema circuits and made available on video within the different reception contexts of Western Europe and North America. These films' representations of masculinities and generations can best be approached by considering some of their

¹ Roy Armes, *Dictionary of North African Filmmakers/Dictionnaire des Cinéastes du Maghreb* (Paris: L'Association des Trois Mondes, 1996) p. 103.

² Audience figures for these films can be found in Ahmed Attia's contribution to June Givanni (ed.) *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000) p. 227.

- 3** For detailed discussion of this issue see Martin Stollery
Creative understandings across contact zones: contemporary Tunisian cinema. Framework vol 41 no 2 (2001)

- 4** As'ad Abu Khalil 'Gender boundaries and sexual categories in the Arab world' *Feminist Issues* vol 15, nos 1-2 (1997), p 100
- 5** See the illustrations accompanying Christopher Alexander, 'Authoritarianism and civil society in Tunisia' *Middle East Reports* vol 27 no 4 issue 205 (1997)

- 6** Valentine M Moghadam (ed) *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books 1994) p 2

- 7** Nancy Lindisfarne 'Variant masculinities: variant virginities rethinking honour and shame' in Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (eds) *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies* (London: Routledge 1994) p 86

precursors within Arab cinema, including *Man of Ashes*, an important early example of contemporary Tunisian cinema which was not particularly assimilable to Western European and North American reception.³

Theorizing North African and Middle Eastern masculinities

Some theorists of gender within North African and Middle Eastern cultures have suggested that, at the most general level, there is a clear homology between patriarchal norms within the domestic and the political spheres. As'ad Abu Khalil suggests: 'the State is but a reflection of male supremacy within the family: the leader is the father figure with the privileges of the use of force and social control maintained intact'.⁴ A plethora of officially sanctioned representations, for example posters proclaiming long-standing president Habib Bourguiba 'Father of Tunisia's First Republic' in the early 1980s, could be cited to support this claim.⁵ Complementing this emphasis on overarching affirmations of paternal authority in both the domestic and the political spheres is an argument about how representations of women are often caught up in basic definitions of what the nation is or should be. These representations can have great symbolic import but do not necessarily signify autonomy for women, since they are typically formulated within male-dominated projects. As Valentine Moghadam puts it in her study of women and politics in Muslim societies 'women frequently become the sign or marker of political goals and of cultural identity during processes of revolution or state-building, and when power is being contested or reproduced.... Women's behaviour and appearance... come to be defined by, and are frequently subject to, the political or cultural objectives of political movements, states, and leaderships'.⁶

These broad assertions about gender and nation provide a useful starting-point for analyzing representations of masculinity in contemporary North African cinema. They may indicate abiding cultural trends. What they overlook, however, are the nuances, subtleties, and contradictions which non-official, non-programmatic cultural arenas such as cinema can, on occasion, publicly articulate. Recent work on 'variant masculinities' and 'the paradoxes of masculinity' within Muslim societies provides an important qualification to more generalized overviews. Nancy Lindisfarne argues that more attention needs to be paid to the spectrum of activity, occluded by the rhetorics of 'honour and shame', which has previously been studied in ethnographic literature on the Mediterranean and the Middle East. 'There is a considerable discrepancy between, on the one hand, men's and women's public agreement with the dominant ideology of gender and, on the other, the great range of their actions'.⁷ Similarly, Deniz Kandiyoti suggests

an approach to the theorization of masculinities within North African and Middle Eastern cultures which avoids positing unified, fixed definitions of Arab masculinity. Instead, she recommends that attention be focused on shifting lines of demarcation *within* as well as *between* genders. From this perspective, the identification of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, related to factors such as age, social status and institutional hierarchies, becomes a central concern. Attention is redirected to the ways in which boundaries between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities are fluid and permeable. They are negotiated within individual life experiences, and redefined over time. For Kandiyoti, ‘behind the enduring facade of male privilege lie profound ambiguities which may give rise to both defensive masculinist discourse and a genuine desire for contestation and change’.⁸

Piercing this ‘facade’ and seeking out ‘discrepancy’ between ideology and actions is precisely what some contemporary Tunisian cinema attempts to do. In particular, male privilege and authority embodied in certain father figures become the objects of scrutiny and contestation. The films focus on domestic dramas, but the questions they raise about relationships across generations and between different types of masculinity hint at potential openings onto wider cultural and political change.

Precursors

In a tribute to the veteran Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine, Tunisian filmmaker and film historian Férid Boughédir declared that *al-Asfour/The Sparrow* (Youssef Chahine, Egypt, 1974) ‘turned Arab cinema around with the incredible audacity of its subject matter and structure’.⁹ He goes on to state that the title of his own *Asfour stah/Halfaouine* is a conscious homage to Chahine’s film. Boughédir is not the only contemporary Tunisian filmmaker to register admiration for *The Sparrow*, and for Chahine as the father figure of choice within North African film history. In Boughédir’s documentary *Caméra Arabe* (1987), fellow Tunisian director and script collaborator Nouri Bouzid is a prominent interviewee. Bouzid recalls an incident from a favourite film which had a profound impact upon him:

Interviewer: You once told me that a scene from *The Sparrow* changed your views on art and Arab society?

Bouzid: Yes, the scene with Cheikh Ahmed . . . He is a very strong character, the image of the virile Arab male who admits no weakness. A giant with a powerful voice. Yet when he sees [Egyptian President] Nasser on television admitting defeat and announcing his resignation [after Egypt’s defeat in the 1967 Six

⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti, ‘The paradoxes of masculinity: some thoughts on segregated societies’, in Cornwall and Lindistam (eds), *Dislocating Masculinity*, p. 212.

⁹ Férid Boughédir, ‘Youssef le fondateur’, in *Spécial Youssef Chahine* supplement to *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 506 (October 1996), p. 40 (translation mine).

Day War] Cheikh Ahmed begins to weep. When I saw that, I cried too. I said to myself ‘This is a new beginning for Arab cinema’.

The Sparrow famously ends with the stunned reaction of various characters featured in the narrative, and the Egyptian people as a whole, to the announcement of Nasser’s resignation. In the final shots a crowd led by the indomitable Bahiyya takes to the streets in a spontaneous demonstration, refusing to accept this situation. Critics discussing the film repeatedly interpret Bahiyya, a woman whose house provides the location which ties together several narrative lines within *The Sparrow*, as a symbol for Egypt itself, particularly in the film’s closing moments. In interviews where he comments on this final scene, Chahine argues that the spontaneous demonstration (modelled upon actual historical events) was a rational as well as an emotional response to the sudden admission of how disastrous the Six Day War had been for Egypt and the Arab world as a whole. The Egyptian people had been deceived about the extent of the defeat and the demonstration was an act of resistance and defiance which ‘said no to defeat, and not yes to Nasser’.¹⁰

¹⁰ Youssef Chahine 1974 interview with Guy Gauthier, extracts reprinted in *Youssef Chahine à Alexandrie*, dossier réuni par Christian Bosséno' *CinémaAction* no. 33 (1985), p. 97 (translation mine)

During his presidency (1954–70), Nasser was widely referred to as the father of the modern Arab nation, a concept which in its pan-Arabist dimensions extended well beyond the boundaries of Egypt. One long-term cultural response to the 1967 crisis within political discourse in Egypt and elsewhere has been the intensification, in Kandiyoti’s terms, of the ‘defensive masculinist discourses’ of conservative and radical Islamic fundamentalism. Chahine, Bouzid and certain other North African filmmakers have offered alternative responses to this crisis.

Another Egyptian film Bouzid cites as an important precursor to his own work is *Night of Counting the Years* (Chadı Abdel Salam, Egypt, 1969). It opens with the burial of the protagonist’s father and the revelation of his father’s secrets as a pharaonic grave robber. The narrative follows the consequences of the son’s decision to break with what he regards as an indefensible tradition. Given the son’s alienation from his father in the film and the wider Egyptian political context of the late 1960s, *Night of Counting the Years* is often interpreted as an oblique allegory about the ‘disenchantment’ and ‘introverted pessimism’ of the final years of Nasser’s regime.¹¹

Discussing this film, Bouzid has pointed to the historical novelty of its introduction into Arab cinema of the figure of ‘the baffled “hero” who can neither accept his ordained lot – to perpetuate the practices of his forebears – nor truly resist and reject it by any effective means’.¹²

Literal and metaphorical father–son relationships, freighted with political and historical ramifications, are central to Bouzid’s early work. He has stated that the ‘attitude that the father is sacred and the difficulty of ridding oneself of him . . . is present in all the films I’ve

¹¹ Edward Said ‘Egyptian rites’ *Village Voice*, 30 August 1983, p. 46

¹² Nouri Bouzid ‘New realism in Arab cinema: the defeat-conscious cinema’ (originally published in Arabic in 1988) *Ahlf Journal of Comparative Poetics* no. 15 (1995) p. 244

13 Noun Bouzid 'On inspiration', in Imru Bakari and Mbye Cham (eds) *African Experiences of the Cinema* (London: British Film Institute 1996), p. 54

made'.¹³ 'Difficulty' is the key word here, sons in Bouzid's first film, *Man of Ashes*, are profoundly troubled characters locked into struggle with themselves and with aspects of their social environment. Bouzid's early films as director address the dilemma Chahine articulates at the end of *The Sparrow*: how to cope with the failure of father figures without conceding political defeat and social and cultural disorientation? Without discounting the 'difficulties' inherent in hierarchical relationships between fathers and sons, and between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, *Man of Ashes* looks towards another axis. It explores what Kandiyoti describes as relationships of 'nurturance' between men who are in different ways stigmatized or marginalized as bearers of subordinate masculinities

Man of Ashes

Roy Armes describes Bouzid as 'undoubtedly . . . the dominant [Tunisian] figure of the [1986–1995] decade . . . [whose films] confront some of the contradictions of Arab concepts of masculinity'.¹⁴ The importance Armes attributes to Bouzid is justified by the fact that, in addition to directing his own, he has collaborated on scripts directed by colleagues, notably *Halfaouine* and *Silences of the Palace*. Within this context Bouzid nevertheless distinguishes between different authorial sensibilities. He writes, for example, that, 'Férid [Boughedir] works through pleasure . . . I've worked through pain'.¹⁵ In all of Bouzid's films, characters suffer intense physical or emotional pain. In his first two, *Man of Ashes* and *Safaith min dhahab/The Golden Horseshoes* (1989), this pain bursts into the present through involuntary subjective flashbacks which threaten to overwhelm those experiencing them. Suppressed, uncontrollable visual memories challenge the precarious integrity of these characters' present existences.

In *Man of Ashes* the memories tormenting the protagonist Hechmi on the eve of his marriage are of rape and abuse by the carpenter, Ameur, to whom he was apprenticed as a child. There is a massive discrepancy between Hechmi's flashback memories of these events and general perceptions of Ameur's standing in the community as a respected family man who, naturally, will be invited to the wedding. Hechmi's marginal and subordinate status is represented through character positioning. In shots involving a group of people in his parents' house making preparations for his marriage, Hechmi is positioned close to the edge of the frame. His frequent absences from the family home and increasingly evident reluctance to go through with the marriage eventually results in a beating from his exasperated, uncomprehending father.

There are three father figures for Hechmi in *Man of Ashes*: the carpenter Ameur, his biological father, and the elderly father of a

¹⁶ For a discussion of *Man of Ashes* initial reception see Lizbeth Malkmus 'Innocence at Carthage: the Tunisian Film Festival Framework' no 34 (1987) p 138

¹⁷ Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes 'Arab and African Cinema' (London: Zed Books 1991) p 139

childhood friend, Mr Levy Hechmi regards the latter with great affection and respect, he is the only person he visits to invite to his wedding. The representation of this relaxed friendship was groundbreaking and controversial in its time. Mr Levy is a member of the Jewish community of Sfax, where *Man of Ashes* is set, and in the lengthy sequence of Hechmi's visit they reminisce nostalgically about happy times.¹⁶ They fondly recall a running joke from when Hechmi was a child about him growing up to marry Mr Levy's daughter, who (like much of Tunisia's Jewish community) has since emigrated. The high point of the visit, and one of the most pleasurable moments in the film, is when Mr Levy picks up his lute and performs a song to celebrate the forthcoming wedding. Lizbeth Malkmus, discussing the specific uses to which music is put in North African films, suggests that 'song is meant to cement already-existing social relations. Song and dance occur at times of communal celebration: religious festivals, circumcisions, weddings. Weddings are particularly favoured because they are so clearly moments of transition, in which an individual moves from one state to another.'¹⁷ Mr Levy's song is the only diegetic musical performance in *Man of Ashes*, and therefore attains significance as a marker of utopian social relations not otherwise represented in the film. The song, and the context in which it is sung, can be enjoyed as a celebration of openness, inter-communal dialogue, and a nurturing rather than oppressive father-son relationship. Both Hechmi and Mr Levy remember the words, the first verse of which is:

I came to see you, the doors were closed
I remember when the streets were joyous
The neighbourhoods have lost their charm
No singing in the happy courtyards now.
The doors don't dance, the locks are silent.
The roofs weep for the parting swallows.

When Hechmi enters and leaves Mr Levy's house, dialogue and shot composition highlight that his door is never locked. This contrasts markedly with Hechmi's next painful flashback memory, shortly afterwards, of his childhood encounters with Ameur. This one begins with shots of a heavy door closing and then Ameur locking the two of them inside his darkened workshop.

The sequence with Mr Levy, whom Bouzid describes as Hechmi's 'spiritual father', crystallizes memories of an alternative, suppressed personal and cultural history which is offset against the flashbacks to Ameur's abuse.¹⁸ This history cannot however be easily retrieved or reinstated. The pleasure of recollection may be intense but the dialogue and song lyrics also very much emphasize the past tense. As if to signify that what he represents is a fading sentiment or dream, Mr Levy is asleep when Hechmi enters and has fallen asleep again just before he leaves. The next that is heard of him is that he

¹⁸ Bouzid 'On inspiration' p 54

has died. At the very least their final interaction is a pleasant reminder, at a crucial moment of transition for Hechmi, of elements of cultural openness which have existed in the past and might possibly do so again in the future. This broad point is made more poignant, more personal, and is again bound up with father-son dynamics insofar as, in the flashback immediately preceding Hechmi's trip to Mr Levy, his father scolds him for playing with Mr Levy's son. Hechmi is warned that 'each should stay with his own'. *Man of Ashes'* narrative is quite elliptical, encouraging viewers to infer connections between scattered fragments of information about characters and narrative events. In this context it is quite reasonable to conjecture that Hechmi's father's attitude may have been one of the reasons why, although Mr Levy recalls that the possibility of Hechmi being apprenticed to him was discussed, he was eventually placed with Ameur. In *Man of Ashes* the past can provide cultural resources for the future as well as being a nightmare which has to be confronted but, ultimately, there is no going backwards. Reliance upon a father figure, however benign and whatever he signifies, is not an option. Bouzid writes of this film that it ultimately implies that 'there is no longer any room for a father and you have to sort out your problems on your own'¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid

Man of Ashes offers no definite resolution to the problems it addresses. It is not 'easy' to watch, either in terms of narrative comprehension or the emotions it probes, but neither is it unremittingly bleak. Representations and intimations of tenderness and nurturing as well as hostility and violence between men are intertwined throughout the film. Through subtle framing, lighting and interplay between actors, the relationship between Hechmi and his closest friend Farfat, also abused by Ameur, is represented as one sustained by deep affection as well as shared memories of childhood victimization. In one unusually framed shot towards the end of a sequence where the two get drunk, the camera is positioned beneath the table in the workshop where they were abused as children. Within this frame, Hechmi gently lifts Farfat onto a makeshift bed, as if they were lovers.²⁰ This shot crystallizes two conflicting currents within *Man of Ashes'* exploration of subordinate and hegemonic masculinities and male intergenerational relationships. Affection, tenderness and egalitarianism confront physical and psychological violence. The former qualities are a constant in the film's representation of the relationship between Hechmi and Farfat. The latter prove difficult to eradicate. Even the sequence featuring Mr Levy's song is intercut with shots of Farfat obtaining a knife. These anticipate the film's penultimate sequence, where Farfat stabs Ameur, who exclaims as he falls to the ground: 'You'll always be my apprentices; I taught you everything you know'

²⁰ I am indebted to my former student Deryck Chester for highlighting the significance of this shot.

Halfaouine

The majority of sequences in *Man of Ashes* are, in terms of their lighting, relatively dark. The bright, open-air shot which ends the film contrasts with much of what has gone before. The final image is a freeze-frame of Farfat, jumping across roofs away from two men pursuing him for Ameur's murder. As Bouzid puts it, 'he flies, he cannot stand roofs', much like the swallows in Mr Levy's song or the sparrow in Chahine's film.²¹ This final shot balances freedom with stasis. The flight motif is taken up in Férid Boughedir's *Halfaouine*, a film which has a lighter tone than *Man of Ashes*. The narrative is centred around the developing masculine identity and sexuality of Noura, a 'rooftop-hopping' adolescent boy. *Halfaouine* contains some of the elements from *Man of Ashes*, reordered and represented differently. Its texture is closer to *Omar Gatlato* (Merzak Allouache, Algeria, 1976), another film acknowledged by Bouzid and Boughedir as an important precursor. *Omar Gatlato*, categorized by Malkmus as an 'anti-epic', dealt with the relatively mundane, gently comic meanderings of the eponymous Omar in his inconclusive pursuit of the young woman to whom he is attracted.²² Both *Omar Gatlato* and *Halfaouine* consist, in Sabry Hafez's description, of predominantly 'well-lit scenes [which] shine] a light of frivolity and comic irony on the situation'.²³ Both films include half-ironic, half-indulgent sequences in which groups of adolescent boys discuss, stare longingly at, or make generally ineffectual attempts to pursue or impress their female counterparts. Where *Halfaouine* differs from *Omar Gatlato* is that it effectively reverses what Armes has identified as the central pivot of the Algerian film's narrative structure, where a 'change in our perceptions is directly linked to the change of the power structure within the film'.²⁴ As the film unfolds, Omar's power and credibility as an initially masterful voiceover narrator and narrative agent is gradually undermined. In *Halfaouine*, despite temporary setbacks and humiliations, Noura's aspirations are eventually realized.

The sparrow-like rooftop-hopping of *Halfaouine*'s adolescent protagonist and his role as errand boy for various people within the community enable him and the film's spectator to observe gaps in the gendered spatial divisions ostensibly regulating the neighbourhood he inhabits. Noura's primary motivation in the narrative, leading him to cross some of these boundaries, is his growing curiosity about women's bodies. This gets him into trouble but also provides one of the bases for his identity as a member of the next generation of adult males. Noura is first seen in *Halfaouine*'s pre-credit sequence, staring blankly in the women's hammam (public baths) he regularly visits with his mother. A series of point-of-view shots detail various aspects of, and activities within, the hammam, and the women around Noura who are as yet oblivious

²¹ Bouzid, 'On inspiration' p. 55

²² Malkmus and Armes *Arab and African Cinema* pp. 77–82

²³ Sabry Hafez 'Shifting identities in Maghribi cinema: the Algerian paradigm' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* no. 15 (1995) p. 71

²⁴ Roy Armes *Omar Gatlato* (Trowbridge Flicks Books 1998) p. 17

to, or unconcerned by, his gaze. During later visits the attendants start to become suspicious about the nature of Noura's gaze and he is eventually ejected from the hammam when he attempts to spy on a naked woman. After this humiliation Noura redirects his gaze towards someone closer to home: Leila, a teenage orphan who comes to work as a maid for his family halfway through the narrative. In the film's penultimate sequence, Noura sees Leila completely naked, and this gives him confidence to defy his father the next morning by climbing onto the roof, looking down, and laughing at him as a flock of birds fly off in the closing shot. Bouzid outlines *Halfaouine*'s narrative trajectory and dominant scopic régime when describing the difference between his aesthetic of pain and Boughedir's aesthetic of pleasure: '[Boughedir's] ultimate aim is the sight and discovery of the body, in other words, a boy becomes a man when he has discovered the female body . . . you could almost say that about cinema. Cinema is the art of discovering and seeing; this can be an aim in itself, and it is in Férid's cinema'.²⁵

25 Bouzid, 'On inspiration' p. 56

26 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge, 1985).

27 Kandiyoti, 'The paradoxes of masculinity' p. 204

28 Interview with Férid Boughebir, in Roy Ashbury, Wendy Helsby and Maureen O'Brien, *Teaching African Cinema* (London: British Film Institute 1998), p. 105.

29 Bouzid, 'On inspiration' p. 54

30 Boughedir's next film *çafun fi Halq al-Wâdy/A Summer in La Goulette* (1996), co-scripted with Bouzid, also features three fathers

The adolescent male child's experience of, and expulsion from, the women's hammam also features in Tunisian author Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's semi-autobiographical *Sexuality in Islam*.²⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti reads the expulsion part of this narrative as a powerful metaphor for the male child's 'abrupt and possibly disturbing entry into the male world', where as an adolescent amongst older men his lived experience of a subordinate masculinity might well become more acute. This experience is possibly 'reactivated throughout men's lives, particularly when they find themselves in all-male contexts which involve hierarchies of power'.²⁷ The hammam nostalgically represented by Bouhdiba and Boughedir is no longer prevalent in present-day Muslim societies. Nevertheless, Kandiyoti suggests that narrating the male child's passage through the hammam can provide a basis for a sensitive metaphorical exploration of some of the 'ambiguities' behind 'male privilege'. This is reflected in a discussion of *Halfaouine* where Boughedir highlights the 'different worlds' of male 'child and adult', and the difficulty of jumping from one to the other, before mentioning the more familiar physical separation of men and women.²⁸ Noura's liminality is paralleled in the other main narrative strand within *Halfaouine*, the circumcision of his younger brother. The film takes as a central premiss Bouzid's provocative claim that 'with us the problem of the father is associated not with the Oedipus complex but with the myth of Abraham, who was prepared to sacrifice his own son. The son submits to the father and serves him'.²⁹ The circumcision is a major social event which brings the whole community together to publicly celebrate the perpetuation of a tradition commemorating Abraham's righteousness and his son's obedience.

As in *Man of Ashes*, there are three types of father figure in *Halfaouine*.³⁰ The excessively violent, monstrous one is a child-

³¹ Bouhedir discusses the provenance of this traditional tale in an interview in Ashbury Helsby and O'Brien *Teaching African Cinema* p. 104

devouring ogre Noura intermittently visualizes or dreams of after hearing the tale of Aisha and the Ogre from various family and community members.³¹ The ogre's imagined presence causes Noura discomfort in the same way as does his brother's impending circumcision. These two anxieties are explicitly linked in Noura's final dream. This begins with a medium-shot of the circumciser brandishing a pair of scissors and ends with a medium-shot of the beckoning ogre. The ogre is nevertheless quite different from Ameur, the violent father figure in *Man of Ashes*. He is unreal, a fantasy figure, part of a bad dream superseded by Noura's exhilaration after seeing Leila. The brute patriarchal power the ogre represents is thereby diminished, and Noura's real biological father is also undermined through the perspective the narrative provides on him. Near to the beginning of the film Noura's real father beats him for following girls in the street, but later in the narrative Noura observes him flirting with female customers in his shop, then pursuing Noura's divorced aunt Latifah who comes to stay with the family. The good father figure, the structural equivalent of Mr Levy in *Man of Ashes*, is Salih, an unmarried cobbler, playwright and musician. He scrawls graffiti satirizing that ultimate father figure, the president, and voices subversively liberal political views which eventually lead to his arrest. He is also relatively open in his pursuit of women, particularly Latifah. Salih owns a sparrow which Noura releases after his arrest, just before returning to his room at the end of the film to find Leila waiting for him in his bed. To a certain extent Salih inhabits a subordinate masculinity due to his unmarried status, his drinking, his musical and theatrical performances, his political views, and his air of playful immaturity which makes him a natural ally of Noura's. However he is more central to the development of the narrative than Mr Levy in *Man of Ashes*.

Salih plays a prominent role within the circumcision celebrations. Seated in the open with a group of men he sings a song about unrequited love which is a thinly veiled appeal to Latifah. Sitting with a group of women in a nearby room, Latifah sings back to him. Salih is a positive father-figure for Noura, their relationship is relaxed and affectionate, and he is the only male character in *Halfaouine* who not only crosses, but also seeks meaningful dialogue across, gendered spaces. By placing this risqué exchange of songs at the centre of its representation of such an important transitional moment in male children's lives, *Halfaouine* affirms an optimistic perspective on the possibility for gradual cultural change through the blurring of distinctions between gendered spaces and between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. The other extended musical performance in *Halfaouine* carries implications which are similar, albeit more boisterously expressed, to those in Salih's song. This features a group of women sitting in a circle, chatting, teasing Noura and preparing for the celebration. They break into an impromptu

song expressing sexual desire and equating penises with cucumbers and aubergines. The sequence concludes when Noura's father arrives, deposits a basket full of vegetables, and the women burst out laughing. Immediately after this Noura is admonished by his father who harshly instructs him that 'men don't hang around with women'. After Noura exits the cramped, confined space in which this exchange takes place, the shot is held whilst his father gazes wistfully towards the direction of the sound of the women's' continuing laughter. Here, hegemonic masculinity is represented as an uncomfortable and isolating position compared to the male child's subordinate yet also more fluid, less constricted experience.

Women's autonomy and desires are registered in *Halfaouine*. For example, after the pre-credit sequence in the hammam, the second group of women Noura observes are sitting on a rooftop joking about how someone they know managed to hide her lover in the basement, unnoticed by her elderly father. A minor narrative strand developed throughout the narrative is the attraction felt by another maid working for Noura's family towards a cheikh who regularly visits the home. This is signalled through her body language, facial expressions and wistful comments, but not acted upon until the final sequence, when she decides to actively pursue her desire by following him out of the house. This coincides with Noura's concluding defiance of his father. The hegemonic masculinity which Noura's father practises, and which the ogre takes to an extreme, is linked here to the repression and regulation of women's, as well as Noura's, subordinate adolescent male sexuality. In Noura's final dream, images of the circumciser snipping his scissors and of the beckoning ogre bookend a shot of the cheikh branding the maid's shoulder and her grimacing from pain and repressed desire. *Halfaouine* is primarily concerned with the renegotiation of relationships between father figures and sons, but the film does begin to address the impact this might have upon women's experiences, and the ways in which acknowledgement and validation of women's experiences might impact upon these changes.

Silences of the Palace

Moufida Tlatli edited *Halfaouine* as well as *Omar Gatlato*, and in 1994 directed her own first feature, *Silences of the Palace*. As she pointed out in one of the interviews she gave following the success at home and abroad of this film, 'through my work as an editor, I have close contact with the contemporary preoccupations of Arabic cinema'.³² In another of these interviews, Tlatli develops a comparison between *Halfaouine* and *Silences of the Palace*:

I was very happy to edit it because he also talks about women. . . There's a similarity in what Férid Boughedir and I show, for

³² Moufida Tlatli interviewed in Laura Mulvey 'Moving bodies, *Sight and Sound*, vol 5 no 3 (1995) p 18

example, that courtyard scene with the women who laugh and sing such risqué songs recalls my kitchen scene, where the women also seem free with no taboos in what they say. For me *Halfaouine* stops there in its representation of women to look at other issues while my scene reveals that what's underneath is different, that beneath the surface of these women's enjoyment there is a hidden and secret pain. That pain I wanted to communicate through silence, through looks.³³

³³ Moufida Tlatli interviewed in a feature on Tunisian women filmmakers for the British television programme *Moving Pictures* (BBC2 1995).

Nouri Bouzid worked on the *Silences of the Palace* script, and Bouzid's, Boughedir's and Tlatli's ongoing collaboration is one reason why their films evince overlapping, but differently inflected, styles and concerns. Tlatli's comments highlight how each of the three Tunisian films discussed here incorporate aspects of their precursors, whilst also departing in new directions. As she emphasizes, *Halfaouine* does attempt to talk to and about women. However, it does not privilege its female characters' subjectivity to the same extent or in the same way as it does Noura's, through point-of-view shots and dream sequences. It could be argued that in *Halfaouine* women tend to become, as Moghadam puts it, 'signs or markers' within a male-defined 'cultural objective' of easing the pain associated with passages between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. However, Boughedir does underline Leila's active, consensual participation, within the terms of a dominant ideology of gender and sexuality, in her exchanges with Noura: 'In Tunisia . . . older girls will explore sexuality with younger boys, because there is no fear of loss of virginity, which is an extremely serious offence for an unmarried girl'.³⁴

³⁴ Interview with Boughedir in Ashbury, Helsby and O'Brien, *Teaching African Cinema*, p. 105. Lindisfarne 'Variant masculinities' discusses a number of similar situations.

Silences of the Palace directly addresses the impact of dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality on the lives of Tunisian women during the 1950s and 1960s. The film is almost entirely structured around the flashback memories of a professional woman singer, Alia. Within these flashbacks her younger self is accorded many point-of-view shots. *Silences of the Palace* eschews *Halfaouine*'s reliance upon the 'sight and discovery' of the female body as the ground for a redefinition of male subjectivity. Instead, Tlatli's film leans more towards Bouzid's aesthetic of powerful, emotionally compelling but painful memories. *Silences of the Palace* begins its framing narrative and flashbacks with questions about fathers, and father–daughter relationships, but by the end the emphasis has decisively shifted to mother–daughter relationships. The film begins in the mid 1960s with Alia performing in a nightclub. She breaks off her song halfway through and returns home suffering from a headache. She is pregnant by her partner, Lotfi, who is pressuring her to have an abortion because, as Tlatli puts it, Alia 'is both a singer and illegitimate', and 'social and family pressures' dictate this as the only possible course of action.³⁵ Lotfi then informs Alia that her supposed biological

³⁵ Tlatli in Mulvey, *Moving bodies*, p. 20.

father, Sidi Ali, a member of Tunisia's deposed royal family (the beys), has died.

Alia returns to the palace where she spent her childhood and this occasions a series of lengthy flashbacks, the majority of the film, focusing mainly on Alia's adolescence up to Tunisian independence in 1956. This phase of Alia's life is marked by curiosity about who her father is. Her mother Khedija is a servant in the palace, from whom sexual services are also expected by the beys, and she refuses to answer Alia's questions. Khedija attempts, as far as is possible, to shield Alia from similar exploitation as she grows older. *Silences of the Palace*'s narrative structure can be described as melodramatic inasmuch as the spectator is encouraged to recognize the self-sacrificing nature of Khedija's actions before Alia does.³⁶ When Alia encounters Lotfi, a young teacher and nationalist revolutionary in hiding from the police, it begins to seem that he and her talent for singing may provide an escape route into a new Tunisia. At the end of her last flashback Alia bravely sings the forbidden nationalist anthem at a wedding in the palace on the eve of independence. This is intercut with Khedija dying in another room from the consequences of a self-performed abortion.

Mothers and daughters are potentially weighted with a heavy burden of national allegory within narratives like this. Critics and historians of North African and Middle Eastern cinema have argued that there is a marked tendency in some films to employ what E Ann Kaplan has broadly described as 'the language of nation as "female"'³⁷ Malkmus, noting this tendency in various North African and Middle Eastern films, urges caution in relation to such parallels. She argues that 'when woman is thought of as spirit of the earth or nation, she has little real leeway in her role'.³⁸ There is, for example, a debate around this in relation to the end of Chahine's *The Sparrow*. Commentators habitually refer to the character Bahiyya, who links the various strands of the narrative together and who leads the demonstration at the end, as symbolizing the heart of Egypt. She can be seen to represent an emotional core which comes to the fore and in this case holds the nation together at a time of crisis. Ratiba Hadj-Moussa points out in relation to the Algerian context that one danger in this type of metaphor is that, although often powerful and vivid, it can block 'specific demands made by women as women' by positing them as first and foremost the national 'guardians of deeper Arab-Islamic values'.³⁹ Whether or not this is the case in *The Sparrow* is open to debate, but as a general point it is certainly pertinent to *Silences of the Palace*.⁴⁰

Tlatli herself suggests in discussing her film that, 'I saw a great similarity between the path taken by the country, what it was and how it changed since independence, and the history of women here: how they used to be and what their rights have been since 1956'.⁴¹ *Silences of the Palace* explores both the extent and the limits of this

³⁶ Relevant here is the discussion of how melodramatic narratives structure spectators' and characters' recognition of crucial bits of narrative information and of particular characters' moral worth, in Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and tears' *Screen* vol. 27, no. 6 (1986).

³⁷ E Ann Kaplan *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 50.

³⁸ Malkmus 'Innocence at Carthage' p. 136. See also Malkmus and Armes, *Arab and African Cinema* pp. 70–3.

³⁹ Ratiba Hadj-Moussa 'The locus of tension: gender in Algerian cinema' in Kenneth W Harrow (ed.) *With Open Eyes: Women and African Cinema* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1997), p. 47.

⁴⁰ In his 1974 interview with Guy Gauthier, Chahine takes pains to stress that the popular response to Nasser's resignation embodied by Bahiyya is not solely an emotional one. *Youssel Chahine L'Alexandrin*, dossier réuni par Christian Bosséno, p. 97. See also Malkmus and Armes *Arab and African Cinema*, p. 71 where, qualifying her general point, Malkmus draws attention to Bahiyya's assertiveness.

⁴¹ Moufida Tlatli, interviewed in the programme *Moving Pictures*.

presumed similarity. There is clearly a sense in which, at least for the young male revolutionary Lotfi, Alia can be interpreted as symbolizing Tunisia. Her defiant performance of the nationalist anthem is preceded by a sequence in a classroom where, in front of a map of Africa, Lotfi tells her ‘you’re as indecisive as our country . . . a new future awaits us’ However, *Silences of the Palace*’s fraught opening sequence, representing subsequent tensions in their relationship, provides a frame which potentially establishes a critical distance between Lotfi’s and the film spectator’s perspective Tunisia’s independence as a nation and Alia’s independence as a woman overlap, but also significantly diverge. Unlike Mr Levy’s nostalgic song in *Man of Ashes* or Salih’s sly, subversive one in *Halfaouine*, Alia’s performance of the nationalist anthem at a dual moment of transition – her legitimate half-sister’s wedding, and the eve of independence – is painfully double-edged. As Laura Mulvey puts it ‘During the film the struggle against colonialism achieves articulation But the silence covering the women’s sexual exploitation is never lifted’⁴² Alia’s singing of the anthem affirms her allegiance to a new, undoubtedly more enlightened, set of revolutionary fathers, but at that moment it also severs her connection to Khedija, who has told Alia that having spent her life there she could never leave the palace In the closing sequence after this final flashback, Alia’s voiceover addresses her mother Given Mulvey’s comments, it is significant that the understanding and resolution gained from reflecting upon this primary relationship does not become a publicly articulated discourse within the film’s diegesis Nevertheless Alia’s voiceover reaffirms her link to her mother and expresses her wish to give birth to a girl so that she can name her Khedija.

Backward glances, future transformations

Contemporary Tunisian cinema offers a rich exploration of the diversity and fluidity as well as the fixities of North African masculinities The films discussed here support Deniz Kandiyoti’s suggestion that questioning established, reductive notions of gender and highlighting differences, conflicts and shifts within individuals between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities might open up wider vistas of cultural and political change *Man of Ashes* and *Halfaouine* interrogate father–son dynamics, emphasizing the male protagonist’s right to challenge bad fathers and to choose ideal ones in the same way that filmmakers like Nouri Bouzid and Férid Boughedir have chosen Youssef Chahine as their ideal predecessor within film history The freedom to choose fathers is implicitly linked to a past utopia of cultural syncretism rather than contemporary ethnic or religious exclusivity in *Man of Ashes*, and to political liberalism as opposed to repressive authoritarianism in

Halfaouine. However, the death of Mr Levy and the arrest of Salih also raise questions about the extent to which even ideal fathers can or should be relied upon

With regard to possibilities for positive change and movement towards new masculinities, *Man of Ashes'* conflicted representations of nurturance and violence within male relationships powerfully dramatize different options without suggesting that change can easily be achieved. *Halfaouine* submits an optimistic, light-hearted plea for tolerance and openness. *Silences of the Palace*, in charting the transition from the rule of the beys to the dominance of the revolutionary generation represented by Lotfi, highlights the ways in which hegemonic masculinities change over time but can also, in many respects, remain the same. The film also asserts that women's intergenerational relationships have a specific rather than just a symbolic role to play within ongoing processes of cultural transformation. *Silences of the Palace* supplements its predecessors by suggesting that understanding, as well as idealizing or confronting, father or mother figures forms a necessary part of such processes. Together, all three films afford considerable insight into struggles to transform representations of masculinities, gender roles and, in the final instance, cultural and political identities within contemporary North Africa.

'A kind of recreative school for the whole family': making cinema respectable, 1907–09

LEE GRIEVESON

The New York Board of Censorship was set up in New York City in early 1909 in the midst of a series of intense debates about the social function of cinema. It met for the first time in March of that year, and amongst the films reviewed was *A Drunkard's Reformation* (Biograph, 1909), which tells the story of the reformation of a male 'drunkard' brought about by attending a temperance drama at the theatre.¹ *The New York Herald* commented:

Until the noble young man with the high forehead and the bow tie resolved that rum should never be his master and began life anew in a beautiful apartment papered with wandering rose bushes it seemed that the new Board of Censorship for Moving Picture films, in session at 80 5 Avenue yesterday, would have reason to object to the first films which were spread before them. But the reformation in the case of the young man, whose life was depicted by the screen, was so sudden and so complete that Professor Charles Sprague Smith . . . and the other censors gathered in the offices of the Motion Pictures Patents Company found no fault with the first sad, sweet story of the young man's life. The film which showed the transition from wickedness to goodness was one of the 28 which were inspected yesterday at the first session of the censors. *The Drunkard's Reformation* took the lead early in the session and held it to the close. It seemed a pity that such a nice young man as he whose history was the subject of the picture

¹ *A Drunkard's Reformation* released 1 April 1909. The film was loosely based on Emile Zola's *L'Assommoir* which had itself been turned into a temperance play by Charles Reade in the 1880s, entitled *Drink*. See Frank Rahill *The World of Melodrama* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 1967) p. 243.

2 *New York Herald* 26 March 1909 p 4 Charles Sprague Smith was the founder and managing director of New York City's People's Institute, a progressive reform organization which aimed to encourage civic activism, participatory democracy and cultural pluralism. The Institute was instrumental in establishing the New York Board of Censorship.

3 Untitled, unpaginated newspaper article in Box 116 National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Collection Rare Books and Manuscripts Division New York Public Library (hereafter NBR).

4 Ibid. For more recent readings of this film see Tom Gunning *D W Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: the Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991) pp. 162–71; Roberta Pearson, *Elloquent Gestures: the Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), in particular pp. 140–43.

5 Richard Butsch, 'Bowery boys and matinee ladies: the re-gendering of nineteenth-century American theater audiences' *American Quarterly* vol. 46 no. 3 (1994) p. 375.

6 Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: the Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1770–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

7 Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class* p. 15. See also Richard Ohman, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 221.

should have ever yielded to the insidious highball and the brain stealing rickey. Still, he found no happiness till he threw away his pint flask and took a new hold on life and its possibilities.²

The film might have been criticized, one of the censors told another reporter, 'had it not pointed out a *moral lesson*, and concluded with a *happy ending*'.³ This 'happy ending' was the family, which had been threatened by the effects of alcohol on the father, reunited. 'Reform came about in this way', the censor continued. 'The man was prevailed upon to accompany the little child to the theatre and there he saw enacted on the stage the story of his own life. When the curtain fell on the last act, he was a *reformed man*' (emphasis mine). The closing image made this process of reformation clear: 'Last scene Good husband, seated at home, smiling wife at his side, and girl on his knee'.⁴

The conjunction of censorship, moral education and images of reformed men and happy domesticity is the focus of this essay, which is premised on a rather simple question: how did the film industry make cinema respectable? Scholars have previously sought to answer this question by focusing principally on class, suggesting that the cinema was made respectable through an appeal to middle-class audiences based on a turn to the forms and names of bourgeois culture in order to uplift cinema's cultural status (and to make more money). Such efforts were reflected in the location of nickelodeons and in the emergence of new textual forms (principally a new configuration of narrative discourse). Though this focus on class is certainly important, its exclusivity has led scholars to ignore both the gendered nature of this process of making cinema respectable and the complex imbrication of class and gender in the self-definition of the middle class. 'Respectability', Richard Butsch has argued, 'was at its core a gendered concept,' and thus entertainment spaces such as theatre in the mid nineteenth century and vaudeville in the late nineteenth century became respectable (and increasingly profitable) through a process of 're-gendering' – a conscious effort to attract middle-class women who, 'particularly as wives and mothers, carried designations of respectability'.⁵ Furthermore, social historians have shown how the self-definition of the middle class in the USA throughout the nineteenth century was predicated on notions of domesticity and gentility which were closely aligned with idealized notions of femininity as moral guardianship.⁶ '[T]he American middle class', Mary Ryan observes, 'molded its distinctive identity around domestic values and family practices', a process that scholars have traced through the proliferation of domestic advice books, improving tracts, magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, and sentimental fiction.⁷

Conceptions and practices of femininity as moral guardianship shifted in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century from the private

⁸ See for example Barbara Leslie Epstein *The Politics of Domesticity Women, Evangelism and Temperance in the Nineteenth Century* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press 1981)

⁹ Details from the Policy and Standards of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures 1915, in Robert Fisher Film censorship and progressive reform: the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures 1909–1922 *Journal of Popular Film*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1975) p. 154 n. 8 Lary May notes a slightly different number suggesting that the actual viewing of films was undertaken by 113 female volunteers and that women were the moral guardians who enforced censorship rules Lary May *Screening Out the Past the Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press 1980) pp. 54–5 By my reckoning, by 1912 fifty-seven out of seventy-five censors were women

¹⁰ See Charles Mathew Feldman *The National Board of Censorship (Review) of Motion Pictures 1909–1922* (New York: Arno Press 1977) pp. 20–32

¹¹ *The New York Times* 24 December 1908, p. 3

to the public sphere, initiating what feminist historians have labelled a ‘politics of domesticity’ as a critical component of Progressive reform movements – central, for example, to the creation of welfare programmes – and effectively redefining the public sphere.⁸ This is the context in which the process by which cinema was made respectable might profitably be re-examined. I contend that in the critical years between 1907 and 1909 this was linked to a ‘feminization’ or ‘domestication’ of cinema space and textuality in line with both the moral discourses associated with women reformers and the commercial imperative of the film industry to cater to a family audience. In this conjuncture, the representation of the reformation of deviant masculinity and the happy ending of domesticity could be positioned by the industry as analogous to the reformation of cinema itself. In turn, this reformation was validated by a newly formed regulatory body that was staffed predominantly by women reformers: by 1915, one hundred out of 115 censors were women.⁹

A precise confluence of historical currents, regulatory concerns and commercial imperatives led, then, to a ‘domestication’ of cinema, simultaneously figured through discursive, institutional and textual formations. This was linked to a concerted effort to differentiate cinema from the homosocial (and classed) space of the saloon, to a reformation of theatre space, and to the production of texts which insistently focused on the reformation of masculinity and the celebration of domesticity. What follows seeks to describe and explain this process and to trace its historical consequences. The first section outlines discursive attempts to make cinema distinct from the saloon and the effects of this on cinemas’ material space. The second section shifts focus to film texts, concentrating on a cycle of temperance dramas produced between 1908 and 1910.

Siting cinema

One of the most highly charged moments in the contestation over cinema in the pre-classical period took place in New York City in late 1908, when Mayor McClellan called a public meeting to debate the safety and morality of nickelodeons (the meeting set in motion a series of events that would lead to the formation of the New York Board of Censorship three months later).¹⁰ At the McClellan meeting members of the clergy and of certain reform groups ‘condemned the nickel theatre as a moral sinkhole and a physical deathtrap’, suggesting that cinema led to ‘the corruption of the minds of children’, to ‘degeneracy and in some instances actual crime’, and was thus a threat to religious, familial and moral order.¹¹ Those ‘interested in the business’ countered by suggesting that individual films could fulfil an educative cultural function and that the

nickelodeon was a safe, respectable family space. In particular, they argued that the cinema was distinct from the saloon. Gustavus Rogers, lawyer for the film interests at the hearing, defended the industry by claiming that on Sundays ‘many a former drunkard now spent that day in such shows with his family’, and R S Symonds, supervisor of the Juvenile League, reiterated this by suggesting that ‘Years ago, the man was in the rum shop on Sunday night. Where do you find him now? Side by side with his children witnessing a moving picture show.’¹² For the film industry and sympathetic reformers, public anxiety about cinema could be assuaged by aligning cinema with domestic space as against the homosocial space of the saloon (and, implicitly, of other male entertainment such as cheap variety, concert saloons, gambling halls, peep shows and brothels).

This stance can be identified from mid 1908 onwards, and it became a central trope in the film industry’s efforts to present itself as respectable. The journal *The Moving Picture World*, for example, noted in mid 1908 that ‘moving picture shows are doing temperance work quietly’ and, furthermore, ‘Men who formerly were rarely seen on the streets in company with their wives and children have come to the practice of taking their family for an hour almost nightly to the five cent shows’.¹³ Such rhetoric was widespread, and was articulated by exhibitors, producers, reformers and, at times, even by those involved in the regulation of cinema. For example, in late 1909 the head of the Police Censorship Board in Chicago stated:

I consider the moving picture theatre properly conducted a boon to any community. It affords entertainment for young and old and my observation has been that it has had a tendency to bring together parents and children who spend the evening in the neighbourhood picture house; there the father can not only entertain himself and his family with the price of a few drinks, which might otherwise be spent in the saloon, but he has the double enjoyment of being with his family.¹⁴

Other examples are easy to find. An anonymous poem entitled ‘A Newsboy’s Point of View’, written around 1910, described how a newsboy witnessed the father of his girlfriend giving up drink after seeing a film about the evils of alcohol, confessing “I never knowed just what a bum I’d gone an’ got to be/until those movin’ pitchers went an’ showed myself to me”¹⁵ Frederick Howe – Chairman of the National Board of Censorship – asserted in 1914 that ‘men now take their women and families for an evening at the movies where formerly they went alone to the nearby saloon’, and William Fox similarly suggested that instead of getting drunk the working man could take his family to the nickel theatre and discover that ‘he was getting a much bigger kick holding his kid’s hand or the hands of his wife, than he would be from getting his drink at the bar’¹⁶

¹² Gustavus Rogers quoted in *New York Herald* 24 December 1908, p. 7. R S Symonds quoted in Daniel Czitrom *The politics of performance from theatre licensing to movie censorship in turn-of-the-century New York* in Francis G Couvares (ed.) *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington, DC Smithsonian Institute Press 1996) pp. 32–3. *The New York Times* further noted that the show owners claimed that ‘working men patronized them while a few years ago they patronized the saloons’. *The New York Times* 24 December 1908, p. 3.

¹³ *The Moving Picture World* 4 July 1908 p. 7.

¹⁴ Sergeant O’Donnell quoted in *The Moving Picture World* 9 October 1909 p. 487.

¹⁵ A newsboy’s point of view in Herbert A. Lamp *The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture* c. 1910 quoted in Daniel Czitrom *Media and the American Mind From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill NC University of North Carolina Press 1982) p. 50.

¹⁶ Frederick C. Howe ‘What to do with the motion-picture show shall it be censored?’, *Outlook* no. 107 20 June 1914 p. 413. William Fox, in the *New York Evening World* 30 November 1912 quoted in Neal Gabler *An Empire of Their Own How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York Doubleday 1988) p. 66.

- ¹⁷ Orrin Cocks A saloon substitute and drink preventive the moving picture show *Pacific Christian Advocate* 17 January 1915 np
- ¹⁸ The Board conducted a questionnaire as early as 1912 to ascertain whether saloons were closing down because of nickel theatres Box 147 NBR In 1916, a letter from the Board was sent out to police chiefs We are making an inquiry concerning the reduction in the number of saloon licenses reported in several states and are particularly interested in the truth of the assertion that saloons are lessening in number because of the motion picture Letter from the National Board of Censorship, 25 May 1916 Box 23 NBR
- ¹⁹ Special Bulletin February 1917 Box 23 NBR
- ²⁰ Vachel Lindsay *The Art of the Motion Picture* (New York Liveright 1970) p 235
- ²¹ On general campaigns for temperance and their focus on the Catholic working classes see Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Chicago IL University of Illinois Press 1963) Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City 1870–1920* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1983)
- ²² See in particular Epstein *The Politics of Domesticity*
- ²³ Epstein argues that the WCTU was proto feminist in its concerns and Paula Baker likewise sees the women-led campaign for temperance as an important moment in the politicization of women noting that it was linked closely to the campaign for suffrage While taking traditional domestic concerns seriously' Baker argues 'the WCTU taught women how to expand them into wider social concern and political activism' Paula Baker 'The domestication of politics women and American political society 1780–1920 *American Historical Review* vol 89 no 3 (1984) p 638 Epstein *The Politics of Domesticity*

Where the 'saloon is anti-social in its effects on the family', said Orrin Cocks, the Advisory Secretary to the National Board of Censorship, moving pictures 'hold together the whole family'.¹⁷ The National Board of Censorship actually conducted investigations in the early 1910s to try to prove that saloons were closing down because of nickel theatres,¹⁸ and took action to stop the film representation of drunkenness, producing a Special Bulletin in 1915 which declared that 'In view of the growing sentiment throughout the country opposing the theme of drunkenness in slapstick comedies, the Board is placed in a position where it must take action ... THE BOARD WILL NOT PASS "DRUNK" COMEDIES'.¹⁹

The rhetorical positioning of cinema as what Vachel Lindsay in 1915 termed a 'substitute for the saloon' clearly drew on the broader cultural struggle over drink which had been reanimated in the late nineteenth century by the contests over cultural authority that accompanied industrialization.²⁰ Concerns about saloons emerged from both Protestant elites and female evangelist traditions, focused respectively on the cultural practices and 'styles of living' of the increasingly Catholic working classes and, in the feminist campaign for temperance, on practices of masculinity (and their effect on domesticity).²¹ As a number of historians of women have suggested, traditions of female evangelism were transformed in the late nineteenth century into a broader social morality centred on the defence of 'home values'. Thus organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) became focused on reshaping masculinity in line with the 'feminization' of middle-class culture (the suppression of roughness, increased restraint, emotional self-control and so on).²² No doubt this was in part based on a nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres and the 'cult of domesticity', but female evangelism went beyond these ideological formations by enlarging what was considered the 'women's sphere' and, indeed, the boundaries of the 'public'. Groups of women began to use the language of motherhood and domesticity to include in political discourse areas of social and family life that until then had been considered the domain of voluntary work.²³ The WCTU's 'politics of domesticity', in particular, led to campaigns against the saloon as a working-class and immigrant space that was effectively closed to women.²⁴ The aim was to 'curb the self-assertive, boisterous masculinity of the saloon, to support and protect the family, and to return the husband – the immigrant working man in particular – to the home'.²⁵

In its attempts to counter the condemnation of cinema as a 'moral sinkhole' the film industry drew on these arguments. This was an important moment in the siting of cinema in 'regulatory space', the broader process of deciding how cinema should be aligned with pre-existing recreational activities such as the theatre and made subject to public decisions and governmental intervention.²⁶ In the struggle to

- ²⁴ On the exclusion of women from saloons see Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, pp 16–21
- ²⁵ Norman H Clark *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: WW Norton 1976), p 13
- ²⁶ For the concept of ‘regulatory space’ see Lee Grieveson ‘Fighting films: race, morality, and the governing of cinema 1912–1915’ *Cinema Journal* vol 38 no 1 (1998)
- ²⁷ See William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson ‘Constructing the audience: competing discourses of morality and rationalization during the nickelodeon period’ *Iris*, no 17 (Autumn 1994)
- ²⁸ On anti-suffrage films see Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), in particular pp 156–68
- ²⁹ Lucy France Pierce, *World Today*, October 1908, p 1052
- ³⁰ *Views and Films Index*, 11 May 1907 quoted in Richard Abel *The Red Rooster Scare Making Cinema American 1900–1910* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1999) p 67; *The Moving Picture World*, 13 April 1907, p 89, *The Nickelodeon* (February 1909) p 34
- ³¹ For a review of recreation surveys in the 1910s see Alan Havig ‘The commercial amusement audience in early twentieth-century American cities’ *Journal of American Culture*, vol 5, no 1 (1982)
- ³² See, for example Kathryn H Fuller *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press 1996), in particular pp 133–68
- ³³ *Universal Weekly*, 6 September 1913, quoted in Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls* p 12
- ³⁴ See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1991); Constance Balides ‘Scenarios of exposure in the practice of everyday life: women in the cinema of attractions’

align cinema with the home as opposed to the saloon, defenders of the industry drew on feminist discourses associated with the campaign for temperance because they could thus bypass the clergy’s general condemnation of the emergent heterosocial leisure world.²⁷ Such an affiliation with feminist discourse would, of course, only go so far – later there would be a slew of antisuffrage films²⁸ – but the attempt to present cinema as respectable was coded clearly in terms of gender. Simply put, the industry presented cinema as aligned with what had historically been constructed as a feminized space, and capable of functioning as what one commentator described as ‘a kind of recreative school for the whole family’.²⁹

This strategy was further informed by the film industry’s growing realization of the importance of women spectators and the family audience. As early as May 1907, the trade journal *Views and Films Index* had attributed the boom in moving pictures principally to ‘the patronage [of] women and children’, *The Moving Picture World* similarly noted that ‘mothers . . . take the children and spend many restful hours there at small expense’, and *The Nickelodeon* flatly asserted that ‘Most of the nickels are feminine’.³⁰ Journalistic accounts and recreation surveys in the 1910s suggest that women formed a significant component of the motion-picture audience, in certain weeks comprising the majority of box-office admissions.³¹ Scholars have also recently shown how fan culture increasingly catered to young women in the 1910s.³² Reform strategies for ‘domesticating’ cinema thus meshed fortuitously with the commercial interest in catering to female audiences as central players in the new culture of consumption. There is evidence to suggest that theatre managers not only understood, but also exploited, the fact that women took a prominent role in family decision-making. The managers of one theatre confessed to women: ‘We want and need your patronage, for where you attend, so will follow the husbands and sons’.³³ It is also the case that the female cinema audience was viewed with considerable unease by those elite reform groups steeped in an ideology of separate spheres, which is to suggest that women cinema-goers were, indeed, increasingly important for the industry.³⁴ Press reports from newly opened nickel theatres and moving-picture palaces between 1907 and 1910 announced intentions to ‘cater especially to the patronage of women and children’, ‘to families, especially ladies and children’, and promise to be ‘ladies and children’s resort[s] in earnest’.³⁵ At the same time, exhibitors such as Eugene Cline were asserting that ‘better business in the long run’ would come to theatres patronized by ‘ladies and children’.³⁶ The proprietors of the Swann Theater in Chicago in 1908 went so far as to assert that ‘The policy of the house recognizes the eternal feminine as the great factor in determining the nature of any amusement enterprise’, further promising that ‘the pictures shown are always carefully selected with the view of pleasing the ladies’.³⁷

Screen vol 34 no 1 (1993)
Janet Staiger *Bad Women
Regulating Sexuality in Early
American Cinema* (Minneapolis
MN University of Minnesota
Press 1995); Lauren Rabinowitz
*For the Love of Pleasure
Women Movies and Culture in
Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New
Brunswick NJ Rutgers University
Press, 1998); Stamp *Movie-
Struck Girls*

- ³⁵ Clippings Book Providence, RI,
Nickel Theatre and Bijou Theater
1906, Volume I quoted in David
Nasaw *Going Out the Rise and
Fall of Public Amusements*
(Cambridge, MA Harvard
University Press 1993), p 163
press release from Worcester
Nickel Theatre quoted in
Rosenzweig *Eight Hours for
What We Will* p 198; Des
Moines Register and Leader 23
July 1907 quoted in Abel *The
Red Rooster Scare* p 67

- ³⁶ Eugene Cline, quoted in Abel
The Red Rooster Scare p 67

- ³⁷ Charles F Morris 'A beautiful
picture theater' *The Nickelodeon*
1 March 1909 p 66

- ³⁸ See Eileen Bowser *The
Transformation of Cinema
1907-1915* (Berkeley CA
University of California Press
1990), pp 45-6

- ³⁹ On the morality of lighted
theatres, see, for example *The
Moving Picture World*, 5 March
1910, p 331, on the introduction
of restrooms and nurseries, see
Bowser *The Transformation of
Cinema* p 39

- ⁴⁰ On the relationship between
movie-theatre design and
department-store interiors, see
Charlotte Herzog 'The movie
palace and the theatrical sources
of its architectural style' *Cinema
Journal*, vol 20 no 2 (1981), and
The archaeology of cinema
architecture: the origins of the
movie theater *Quarterly Review
of Film Studies* (Winter 1984)

- ⁴¹ See Russell Merritt 'Nickelodeon
theatres, 1905-1914 building an
audience for the movies' in Tino
Balio (ed) *The American Film
Industry* second edition
(Madison WI University of
Wisconsin Press 1985), p 96
Douglas Gomory *Shared*

Female theatre-owners were also frequently singled out for praise by the trade press for the air of respectability they brought to the business.³⁸

The discursive production and promotion of cinema as a safe heterosocial space had a series of material effects, including the innovation of lighted theatres (to counter the possibility of immoral behaviour and, in particular, harassment by men) and the introduction of restrooms and nurseries.³⁹ This latter development, along with improved ventilation, perfumed deodorizers, mirrored common areas, luxurious decoration and uniformed attendants, was borrowed from department store interiors, themselves carefully designed to appeal to female consumers.⁴⁰ Exhibitors initiated matinee showings to attract female audiences (often half-priced), competitions such as baby photograph contests, free gifts of teddy-bears and perfume, space for baby carriages and, more generally, made a conscious effort to transform the rowdy space of nickelodeons to polite standards of decorum.⁴¹ Such changes signalled a clear attempt to cater to women as decision-makers in the new culture of consumption, while simultaneously assuaging reform and governmental anxiety about cinema by creating a public space that was homely, blurring the boundaries between public and private space and reconciling the seemingly contradictory cultural formations of respectability and consumption. Given this context, we might profitably re-examine the location of nickelodeons. Were theatres located (like department stores) along what historian Stuart Blumin calls an 'axis of respectability', in thoroughfares, for example, that were well lit?⁴²

Tempering movies

Theatrical temperance dramas proliferated in the mid nineteenth century in conjunction with a reformation of the cultural status of theatre that was, historians Richard Butsch and Bruce McConachie suggest, aligned with ideals of education and with appeals to women and family audiences as signifiers of respectability.⁴³ The creation of museum theatres in the 1840s was an important development within this reformation process. Such theatres featured lectures on a variety of educational and moral topics but could also be used for the presentation of 'moral dramas', beginning significantly with the temperance drama *The Drunkard Or the Fallen Saved* (1843), which was described at the time as a 'moral domestic drama'.⁴⁴ The play ran for more than one hundred performances at a time when theatres typically changed their bills every night, and was chosen by P.T. Barnum to open the American Museum in New York in 1848. Museum theatres and moral dramas cut across class formations by fusing ideals of entertainment and 'instruction', and set in process the acceptance of theatre as a source of education and morality and,

Pleasures: a History of Movie Presentation in the United States (Madison WI University of Wisconsin Press 1992), p. 31

Stamp *Movie-Struck Girls* p. 23

Musser *The Emergence of Cinema*, p. 432 Douglas Gomery

Saxe amusement enterprises the movies come to Milwaukee

Milwaukee History, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1979) p. 23 Rosenzweig

Eight Hours for What We Will pp. 204–15 Hansen *Babel and Babylon* pp. 76–99

⁴² Blumkin *The Emergence of the Middle Class* p. 238

⁴³ Butsch Bowery boys and matinee ladies

⁴⁴ Quoted in Rahill *The World of Melodrama* p. 242

⁴⁵ On this see Parker R. Zellers, 'The cradle of variety: the concert saloon' *Educational Theatre Journal* vol. 20 (December 1968)

⁴⁶ There were films with drunkenness and temperance as themes prior to 1908 such as *The Drunken Acrobat* (Biograph 1896), *Carrie Nation Smashing a Saloon* (Biograph 1901), *Drunkard and Statue* (Pathé, 1904) and *The Moon Lover* (Pathé 1906) but these were principally comic. The transformation of the theme of drunkenness from comedy to melodrama speaks to a larger transformation from a risqué and potentially immoral cinema to a cinema closely intricated with moral discourse. See Tom Gunning 'From the opium den to the theatre of morality: moral discourse and the film process in early American cinema', *Art and Text*, no. 30 (September–November 1988).

⁴⁷ *Effecting a Cure*, for example, was advertised as 'A Lesson to the Wives of Recreant Husbands' and the bulletin accompanying it noted 'This Biograph subject will afford many a wife an opportunity to profit by its lesson'. See Bowser (ed.) *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 252, *The Moving Picture World* 24 December 1910, p. 1476. Selig advertised *The Drunkard's Fate* as a 'temperance masterpiece that "teaches a great temperance lesson" (and *Variety* observed that the film ended with a good

in turn, the differentiation of respectable theatre from the variety theatre still closely linked to concert saloons.⁴⁵

There are obvious differences between the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and between the cultures of the theatre and cinema, but the context sketched so far does suggest that the reformation of the cultural status of cinema also centred on efforts to promulgate ideals of instruction alongside an engendering of the space of cinema as distinct from the homosocial space of the saloon. This is borne out not only by the insistent appeals to female spectators in the trade press already cited, but also by the proliferation of filmed temperance dramas from 1908 onwards.⁴⁶ some of which had direct theatrical intertexts, for example, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (Essanay, 1909), *A Drunkard's Reformation* (Biograph, 1909), which featured a theatrical production of *Drink*, and *Drink* (Pathé, 1909) itself. Other films drew on this discursive tradition and on the thematic repertoire of theatrical dramas, for example, *Father and Drunkard* (Pathé, 1908), *The Broken Locket* (Biograph, 1909), *The Drunkard's Fate* (Selig, 1909), *The New Minister, or, the Drunkard's Daughter* (Kalem, 1909), *What Drink Did* (Biograph, 1909), *The Expiation* (Biograph, 1909), *The Honor of the Slums* (Vitagraph, 1909), *A Change of Heart* (Biograph, 1909), *A Slave to Drink* (Kalem, 1910), and *Effecting a Cure* (Biograph, 1910). These films were closely linked to industry rhetoric about family values and the distinctions between nickel theatres and saloons. They could be seen as self-consciously attempting to appeal to female audiences (at least, to what the industry assumed women wanted to watch), and to a 'respectable' audience more generally, both through a validation of the educative cultural function of cinema – these films were often advertised as 'lessons' or 'sermons'⁴⁷ – and through their representation of the dangerous effects of male drinking on the family. They clearly and overtly intervened in the moral debate about the cinema, internalizing external debates through a thematic emphasis on the reformation of masculinity as metonymic for the reformation of cinema itself.

The reformation of masculinity in the temperance film came principally through the actions or sacrifice of a child. For example, the film *Father and Drunkard* tells the story of a sailor returning home to his wife and young son but then neglecting them because of his drunken gambling.⁴⁸ The son is sent to bring the father back from the saloon, but is thrown roughly aside. He runs to get his mother but on their return he falls into a river. The father sees his son battling for life, 'the man in him plays strongly' and he saves the child. 'The last scene shows the little family and the witnesses of the near tragedy gathered round a table, where the now sober father smashes the liquor bottle and earnestly vows never more to drink'.⁴⁹ The family is reconstituted through the father's reformation – from drunkard to father, as it were – initiated by the child. The last scene

temperance lesson which some patrons of picture houses may profit by.) See Kay Sloan *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana IL University of Illinois Press, 1988) p. 97. *The Moving Picture World* 9 October 1909, p. 505; *Variety* 9 October 1909, np. *What Drink Did* was described as 'a powerful moral lesson' and *A Drunkard's Reformation* as 'the most powerful temperance lesson ever propounded and a masterful powerful sermon on the evils of the drink habit'. *The Moving Picture World* 29 May 1909, p. 703. Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*. *The Moving Picture World* 31 July 1909, p. 165.

⁴⁸ See the review in *The Moving Picture World* 11 January 1908, p. 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 28.

⁵⁰ See Gunning *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* p. 142 and for a list of films, p. 149, n. 25.

⁵¹ This concept of 'allegiance' draws on the work of Murray Smith. See Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995) in particular pp. 186–227.

⁵² Biograph bulletin for *What Drink Did* in Bowser (ed.), *Biograph Bulletins*, p. 94. *The Moving Picture World* 29 May 1909, p. 722.

⁵³ *The Moving Picture World*, 5 June 1909, p. 753.

⁵⁴ On the play see the details in Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* pp. 244–6. On the film see the review in *Variety*, 19 June 1909, np.

⁵⁵ I have come across just one film in which the drunkard was a woman. *Converted*, distributed by Kleine Optical Company, was released in January 1909. The film was reviewed in *The Moving Picture World* 9 January 1909, p. 43, and 13 March 1909, p. 302.

⁵⁶ See the reviews in *The Moving Picture World* 20 February 1909, p. 212 and 6 March 1909, p. 268.

exemplifies the new emphasis on narrative closure that was emerging in US cinema from 1908: the reunited family embraces, seemingly seeking to initiate a similar reconciliation in the space of the auditorium.⁵⁰

What Drink Did tells a similar story. The film opens with a happy family seated around the breakfast table. The father plays with his two daughters and, when leaving for work, hugs both them and his wife. At work kettles of beer are brought in at lunchtime and he is coaxed into taking a drink. After work he is pressured to go for a drink by his colleagues and, though reluctant, joins them. Scenes of him drinking are intercut with scenes of his wife and children at home, with the wife clearly becoming increasingly concerned. This contrast edit intervenes to comment on events, making clear to the audience the effects of drinking on the family and setting in place a structure of 'allegiance' with the moral position of the mother.⁵¹ The contrast attendant upon the man's drinking becomes clearer after the father returns home, when the family rush to greet him but are brushed aside, and further the following morning when the father ignores his daughters in a clear contrast with the opening of the film. 'The blight of rum', the bulletin notes, 'changes the stamp of nature, turning the heretofore good-tempered man into a veritable demon'.⁵² Following work the next day he initiates the drinking, and one of the daughters is sent to look for him. The father brushes her away twice and when she returns again pushes her over. At this, the barman gets angry and in a scuffle is hit by the father; the barman gets a gun and shoots but accidentally kills the daughter. The father, at the front of the frame, cradles her in his arms; in his distress he attacks his friends. The close of the film moves forward in time. The man leaves work and is asked if he will go for a drink. He declines and arrives home, where the wife and remaining child are now dressed in grey – in contrast to the white at the opening of the film – and the family hug one another. The man kneels, cries and holds his child. This sombre conclusion, carried through the mise-en-scene and in the contrast with the opening of the film, makes plain the dangerous effects of drinking and, in turn, 'how men should be'. *The Moving Picture World* review noted that 'A moral lesson is taught in this excellent Biograph film', and, further, that 'The film could be used to advantage by religious and temperance organisations'.⁵³

The Essanay version of the classic temperance drama, *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*, tells a similar story, with the drunkard's child fatally hit by a missile thrown at the drunkard, who subsequently reforms.⁵⁴ The reformation scene was critical to most of these films, which suggested that a certain type of masculinity was problematic and needed to be brought into line through the dictates of domestic ideology.⁵⁵ *The New Minister, or, the Drunkard's Daughter* ends with the drunkard 'now a reformed man', restored to his estranged daughter.⁵⁶ In *The Honor of the Slums*, the 'hero' spends his time at

⁵⁷ *The Moving Picture World* noted that the film was unusually strong from a religious standpoint and 'could well be used by religious organisations in illustrating the saving grace of what they preach' *The Moving Picture World* 20 February 1909, p 203

⁵⁸ Biograph Bulletin for *A Change of Heart* in Bowser (ed) *Biograph Bulletins*, p 133

⁵⁹ Biograph Bulletin for *A Drunkard's Reformation* in Bowser (ed) *Biograph Bulletins*, p 77

⁶⁰ Gunning *D W Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* pp 162–71 Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures* pp 140–43

the saloon while his wife joins the Salvation Army to ensure other families do not end up like hers. After a bar-room fight, the hero reforms and also joins the Salvation Army.⁵⁷ *A Change of Heart* tells the story of a son of 'indulgent parents' getting mixed up with the wrong crowd 'Drinking is always the feature of such parties', the bulletin intones, 'and the head and heart benumbed by the fumes of alcohol are never normal and the being is morally weakened, oftentimes falling into a morass of irreparable ruin'.⁵⁸ The son dupes a country girl into going through a pretend marriage ceremony, but after speaking to his mother he realizes the error of his ways and persuades the girl to marry him for real.

A Drunkard's Reformation is in many ways the most self-conscious of these films in respect of the broader regulatory and commercial context. The film opens with the wife and daughter at home and contrasts this with a shot of the father at the saloon. The two spaces are contrasted through parallel editing, which suggests a temporal simultaneity but spatial differentiation, and sets up a structure of allegiance with the moral position of the suffering mother. The father returns home and disrupts the domestic space, frightening the wife and daughter with his drunken violence. He is, however, persuaded to take his daughter to the theatre to see a temperance drama, repents and returns home, in the words of the *Biograph Bulletin*, 'a changed man' as a result of 'the psychological influence' of the play on the audience.⁵⁹ The film's final shot shows the family together, bathed in the light from the hearth. The space of the saloon and the theatre thus pivot around the domestic space, with the saloon threatening it and the theatre upholding it. The theatrical space is one where fathers and children can be together safely. This is a moment when cinema was clearly drawing on an association with theatre and its shift into the realms of respectability.

This representation of the positive 'psychological influence' of drama responds to criticism of the social and psychic functioning of moving pictures, utilising filmic discourse – parallel editing, implied point of view, shot/reverse-shot, lighting – for the presentation of film as an educational and moral medium. For Tom Gunning and Roberta Pearson, both of whom offer insightful readings of *A Drunkard's Reformation*, this is linked to the presentation of character and to the use of structures of 'identification' such that audiences are effectively aligned with some characters and sorts of behaviour as opposed to others.⁶⁰ *A Drunkard's Reformation* shows this in process, with the drunkard literally miming the process of alignment at the theatre in an extended twenty-shot sequence cutting between the play and the drunkard's reaction to it, forming a proto-point-of-view/reaction-shot pattern and a perceptual position that allows a form of access to the character's emotions. This is further enabled by an acting style that leans towards the psychological delineation of character. The film is, then, as Gunning asserts, not

⁶¹ Gunning 'From the opium den to the theatre of morality' p. 37

⁶² Biograph Bulletin for *A Drunkard's Reformation* in Bowser (ed.) *Biograph Bulletins* p. 77 (untitled, unpaginated newspaper article Box 116 NBR)

⁶³ Gunning 'D W Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film'

⁶⁴ Gunning 'From the opium den to the theatre of morality' p. 31

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 22

simply a film with a moral lesson, 'but a film one of whose lessons is that *film can be moral*, that watching an edifying drama can have a transforming effect on the spectator'.⁶¹

In addition, given the context outlined here, I would argue that we can be more precise about the rhetorical parameters of this transformative effect: it is a male spectator who is represented as being reformed by edifying drama – becoming, commentators noted, a 'changed man', a 'reformed man', because it is, insistently, the male drunkard in these temperance dramas who must be reformed.⁶² Masculinity is the problem and the 'moral orientation' of the text positions the spectator in a structure of allegiance with the suffering women and children. Male spectatorship in *A Drunkard's Reformation*, we may say, involves the man opening himself to the instruction of women (and children) and this mirrors the position of the industry itself at this moment in cinema history.

The more general historical emergence of a moral structure in the narrative process is central to Gunning's influential reading of the emergence around 1908 to 1909 of what he terms the 'narrator system', for Gunning a critical precursor to the slightly later emergence of classical narrative conventions.⁶³ Gunning argues that the transformation of American cinema from a 'cinema of attractions' to a cinema of 'narrative integration' involved a 'conscious movement into a realm of moral discourse'.⁶⁴ The particular narrative configuration of American cinema emerged in close conjunction with issues of morality and respectability linked by Gunning to the (here rather amorphous) middle class, and this was reinforced with the emergence of censorship institutions (principally from 1909) which channelled film 'towards an imbrication of narrative development and moral discourse', standardizing formulas of acceptable content and narrative development.⁶⁵ For Gunning, the interweaving of formal and institutional factors at this moment set in play the conditions which led to classical Hollywood cinema

If the above outline of the importance of gender to conceptions of respectability is factored into this argument, we can understand the importance of gendered discourses to the moral discourse of the cinema of narrative integration. In the examples above, narrative discourse is tied up with reform discourse which, in turn, is linked to the ideological goals of women reformers and their emergent roles as 'civic housekeepers'. Cinema's move into the realm of moral discourse was, then, perhaps more closely aligned to early feminist discourse than has hitherto been realized. If this is the case it may in turn suggest a revised genealogy of classicism. No doubt further systematic work needs to be undertaken in terms of narrative and thematic analysis of films from this period and into the 1910s, and, in particular, into the complexities of structures of alignment and allegiance, but the above analysis may suggest that what emerges at the stuttering outset of classicism is a narrative system that is

⁶⁶ For an early formulation of what such a project might look like focusing closely on *The Drive for a Life* (Biograph 1908) see Lee Grieveson, 'Knowable man drive for life' in Tim Armstrong (ed.) *American Bodies: Cultural Histories of the Physique* (New York: New York University Press 1996).

⁶⁷ Nick Browne, Griffith's family discourse Griffith and Freud in Christine Gledhill (ed.) *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute 1987) p. 224. See also Michael Allen, *Family Secrets: The Feature Films of D.W. Griffith* (London: British Film Institute 1999).

principally centred on the threat to, and recuperation of, domestic order.⁶⁶ Frequently in films of this period the family is initially separated only to be brought back together by the agency of narrative. Future work may well need to pay more attention to Nick Browne's suggestive observation that the 'development of the cinematic language was, from the very start, linked to a particular subject matter . . . the family'.⁶⁷

Thus far this essay has suggested that part of the strategy of presenting cinema as respectable was to differentiate cinema from the saloon, drawing on early feminist discourses to suggest that cinema was a space where families could be together and in which men could be reformed. This meant the reformation of both cinema space and cinema texts, exemplified here by a cycle of temperance dramas but suggesting more generally that cinematic narrative codes emerged in the context of gendered norms of respectability. This process was no doubt also mandated by the film industry's growing recognition of the importance of women audiences, not just as signifiers of respectability but also as paying customers. Once underway, the process was less about respectability and more about commercial imperatives, and it is worth noting that the importance of female audiences underscored a series of developments in the following years: the serial-queen cycle of the 1910s, the growth of fan magazines directed at female readers, the emergence of powerful female stars such as Mary Pickford, the increasing presence of women scriptwriters from 1913 onwards, and the proliferation of women-aimed discourses surrounding film stars through the 1920s.

There is no doubt that this appeal to women spectators constructed and shaped the encounter of women with cinema in various ways and drew on deeply rooted and essentialist conceptions of gender roles (as, of course, did notions of women's innate morality). Women were addressed as consumers in ways that played on entrenched cultural constructions of gender. If amusements such as the cinema solicited the female gaze, they also confirmed woman's status as object of the gaze, both on and off screen, in what Lauren Rabinowitz describes as a 'double-edged process of subjectification and objectification'.⁶⁸ Similarly, Shelley Stamp's recent book, *Movie-Struck Girls*, insightfully details the concerns articulated in the 1910s about both women's presence at the cinema and the implications of female spectatorship, drawing attention also to the contradictions between the idealization of the moral female spectator and the actual interest of women in stories with subject matter like sexuality, action-adventure, and feminist agitation.⁶⁹ Furthermore, scholars have noted how critics of mass culture in the early years of the twentieth century used femininity to symbolize precisely its supposed effects of cultural passivity and decay.⁷⁰ American modernist writers launched

⁶⁸ Lauren Rabinowitz, 'Temptations of pleasure: nickelodeons, amusement parks and the sights of female sexuality', *Camera Obscura*, no. 23 (1991) p. 85.

⁶⁹ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, in particular pp. 24–101.

⁷⁰ See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1986), in particular pp. 44–64; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf 1977).

⁷¹ Ann Douglas *Terrible Honesty
Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*
(New York: Farrar Straus and
Giroux 1995) p 246

⁷² See T J Jackson Lears, *No Place
of Grace Antimodernism and the
Transformation of American
Culture 1880–1920* (New York:
Pantheon Books, 1981), Kibler
Rank Ladies p 205 Abel *The
Red Rooster Scare* pp 151–74

⁷³ See Lee Grieveson, *Policing
Cinema Regulating Early
American Cinema* (Berkeley CA:
University of California Press,
forthcoming)

‘an explosive protest against maternal suffocation and infantilization’;⁷¹ there was a backlash against women authors and the female patrons of the theatre and a corresponding ‘remasculinization’ of various cultural practices, including the cinema in Richard Abel’s account.⁷²

Clearly, the process described in this article is but one element of the more complex and shifting trends that saw the production of cinema as respectable and profitable, and we need to think further about the shifting positions of class, gender and the economy and, in particular, about the friction between *laissez faire* capitalism and patriarchal ideology. It may also be necessary to pay more attention to the broader reform context for understandings of masculinity in this period and to examine discourses about not only temperance but also sexuality. On the evidence so far I would argue that it was the regulation of masculinities even more than femininities that shaped cinema’s move to classicism.⁷³

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If looks could kill: image wars in *Maria Candelaria*

ANDREA NOBLE

In his wittily titled essay ‘All the people came and did not fit onto the screen’, Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis outlines the impact that the cinema had upon Mexican society. In particular, Monsiváis is concerned with cinema’s role in the modernizing processes at work in the first half of the twentieth century, as the State sought to redefine national identity and make the transition from a predominantly rural to urban, Catholic to secular, and pre-modern to modern cultural/political entity. In the face of the uneven social, cultural and economic effects of these processes, the role of cinema was crucial. ‘With hindsight, we can see the basic function of the electronic media at their first important moment of power. they mediate between the shock of industrialization and the rural and urban experience which has not been prepared in any way for this giant change, a process that from the 1940s modifies the idea of the nation’.¹ The suggestive title of Monsiváis’s essay obliquely signals the importance of the cinema’s role as cultural mediator: one that was, moreover, predicated on a screen–spectator relationship. ‘All the people came and did not fit onto the screen’ indicates a screen–spectator relationship that promoted spectatorial identification with a repertoire of new and traditional images associated with ‘Mexicanness’ (*lo mexicano*) that were played out onscreen. Given that spectatorship is clearly a key issue for an understanding of the intersection between the reconfiguration of Mexican national identity in the twentieth century and the parallel development of the Mexican cinematic industry, how might we offer an account of the specificities of Mexican spectatorship?

¹ Carlos Monsiváis, ‘All the people came and did not fit onto the screen: notes on the cinema audience in Mexico’, in Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (ed.), *Mexican Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 151.

- 2 For an overview of spectatorship studies see Susan Hayward *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (London Routledge 1996) For a more detailed discussion see Judith Mayne *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London Routledge 1993)

Over the last thirty years, spectatorship as a mode of analysis has gained currency in theoretical approaches to both film and the visual arts, particularly in Anglo-American scholarship. Here is not the place to offer a detailed account of the development of this field of study, it is already well documented.² In this essay, which aims to address issues of spectatorship within the context of Mexican cinematic experience, the following points will underpin the discussion: (1) the dynamic exchange of looks (the gaze) that takes place in the cinema; (2) the way in which the screen addresses the spectator and the spectator's active role in the production of meaning; (3) the way in which screen images are neither innocent or neutral, but implicated in ideological configurations of power; (4) the way in which film texts promote spectatorial identifications and thereby produce ideological subject positions.

Classic approaches to spectatorship have, however, recently become the subject of scrutiny and revision in Anglo-American film studies. They have been critiqued on the grounds of certain totalizing tendencies: on the one hand, classic studies in spectatorship tended to convert the spectator into a passive victim of the processes at work in the viewing experience, and on the other, an emphasis on psychoanalytical paradigms resulted in a tendency to foreclose the possibility of offering a more culturally and historically inflected account of viewing relations. In the words of Linda Williams in her excellent introduction to *Viewing Positions*

The singular, unitary spectator of what I will, for purposes of abbreviation, call gaze theory, has gradually been challenged by diverse viewing positions. Whereas 1970s and 1980s film theory tended to posit . . . a unitary way of seeing, contemporary discussions of spectatorship emphasize the plurality and paradoxes of many different historically distinct viewing positions. The issue that now faces the once influential subfield of spectatorship within cinema and indeed all visual studies is whether it is still possible to maintain a theoretical grasp of the relations between moving images and viewers without succumbing to an anything goes pluralism.³

Williams's notion of the plurality and paradoxes of historically distinct viewing positions and the issue of whether it is indeed possible to offer a theoretically informed account of the screen-spectator relationship are fundamental to this discussion of the viewing subject in Mexican cinema. If moviegoing was on the rise, particularly in the 1940s during the so-called 'golden age' of Mexican cinema, and if, as Monsiváis argues, cinema took on a crucial modernizing role, then I suggest that this period also saw the emergence and formation of a specifically Mexican cinematic gaze. However, this gaze did not simply emerge from a cultural vacuum. Rather, it will be my contention that the gaze has a history in

- 3 Linda Williams (ed.) *Viewing Positions Ways of Seeing Films* (New Brunswick NJ Rutgers University Press 1994) p. 4

Mexico, a history whose origins can be located in the matrix of looking relations that developed prior to the advent of cinema in the twentieth century, namely in the colonial period. Despite the ideological chasm that separates them, the gaze that is subject to the processes of modernization in the 1940s and the gaze constituted in the colonial period overlap in surprising and significant ways. In what follows, I explore *María Candelaria* (Emilio Fernández, 1944) as a film that furnishes a field upon which historical conflicts and transformations at the level of the gaze are registered and inscribed. There will be two interconnected strands to my argument. The first is concerned with the film's intradiegetic looking relations, the second with the convergence of intradiegetic with extradiegetic looking relations within the context of the cinematic experience in 1940s Mexico.

Looking inside *María Candelaria*

Before pursuing this discussion of looking relations within Fernández's film, however, a brief synopsis is in order. Set in 1909, *María Candelaria* is narrated in the form of a flashback triggered by a conversation that takes place between a woman journalist (Beatriz Ramos) and an unnamed painter (Alberto Galán), in which the latter explains to the former his motives for refusing to sell his famous nude painting of an Indian woman. (This frame narrative and particularly the famous painting will become central to my discussion below.) The indigenous woman in question is María Candelaria, ostracized by nearly all in her community (on the grounds that her mother was a prostitute), except Lorenzo Rafael (Pedro Armendáriz). The idealistic but impecunious couple plan to marry María Candelaria, however, falls ill with malaria and, denied the State-provided quinine by the villainous don Damián (Miguel Inclán), Lorenzo Rafael breaks into don Damián's shop and steals the quinine along with a dress. Lorenzo Rafael is imprisoned and, in order to secure the money for his release, María Candelaria agrees to model for the painter, who early on in the film becomes enraptured by her 'indigenous beauty'. On discovering that the painter wishes her to model for a nude study, María Candelaria refuses, leaving the painter to complete his image based on the body of another Indian woman. The villagers see the painting and, assuming that María Candelaria has indeed modelled for it, burn her home and stone her to death.

What particularly interests me about *María Candelaria* is that at the centre of Fernández's film lies a contest between two clearly delineated gazes with origins in the colonial period. The loci of these gazes are embodied in the unnamed painter and Lorenzo Rafael, who represent white *criollo* versus indigenous Mexico respectively. These two characters engage in a struggle over the right to possess María

Candelaria that is presented in both visual and economic terms. The spectator witnesses this conflict in the scene set, significantly, in a marketplace in which the painter first encounters María Candelaria. He offers to purchase all María Candelaria's flowers, a transaction that would resolve the couple's economic problems, in return for permission to paint her. Lorenzo Rafael angrily denies him consent and, muttering some unsubtitled words in Nahautl, hastily sends María Candelaria away. Later in the film, after Lorenzo Rafael's imprisonment, he stubbornly refuses the painter the right to represent María Candelaria, accepting the painter's 'sweetener' also to paint him, but is emphatic that 'as far as painting María Candelaria is concerned, I prefer you not to' ('en lo tocante a María Candelaria, yo prefiero que no'). Such a substitution (him for her), however, is not a viable option. Within the painter's (and the film's) visual economy, María Candelaria's commodity value resides in what she represents, namely 'the very face of Mexico' ('el rostro mismo de México'). Or, as an object belonging to an enduring western painterly tradition, namely the female nude, María Candelaria might more aptly be described as 'the very body of Mexico'.⁴ In other words, the contest that lies at the heart of the film revolves around the right to gaze not just upon a woman, but upon the (feminine) embodiment of the nation.

⁴ See Lynda Nead *The Female Nude Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992) for a detailed discussion of the status and significance of the female nude within the western iconographic tradition.

That the film semiotizes María Candelaria as 'Mexico' is made abundantly clear throughout. Moreover 'Mexico', as embodied (and envisaged?) by María Candelaria is an essentially syncretic, hybrid entity. In her detailed discussion of the film, Joanne Hershfield points out that the opening sequence establishes an association between the female indigenous subject, the pre-Columbian past and the post-Columbian present:

A montage of pre-Columbian images illustrating this indigenous past ends with a shot of a young Indian woman standing next to the stone figure of an Aztec woman that has the same high cheekbones and proud facial expression as the live woman . . . Fernández's shot specifically links that past to the present through his representation of Mexico's 'eternal' Indianess.⁵

⁵ Joanne Hershfield *Mexican Woman Mexican Cinema* (Tucson AZ: University of Arizona Press 1996) p 55

This metonymic chain of associations, in which woman-as-cultural-artefact links past to present, is further extended to María Candelaria, whose parallel status in the frame narrative as artefact is manifest in the presence of the fateful painting and the curiosity that it arouses. She too is linked to the imagistic dialogue between pre-Columbian past and post-Columbian present established within the film's diegesis and made explicit in the painter's explanation of what the famous painting depicts: 'an Indian of pure Mexican race. As you can see, this Indian possessed the beauty of the ancient princesses whom the *conquistadores* came to subjugate' ('una india de pura raza mexicana. Como puede usted ver, este indígena tenía la belleza

de las antiguas princesas que vinieron a sojuzgar los conquistadores').

But even as María Candelaria is associated with pure indigenous 'essence', she is also an embodiment of the post-Columbian Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe.⁶ There are two key moments in the film in which this association is dramatically crystallized. The most obvious occurs after Lorenzo Rafael is imprisoned, when María Candelaria visits the church to remonstrate with a statue of the Virgin 'why don't you listen to me? . . . you are hard on us' ('¿y tú por qué no me oyes? . . . con nosotros eres dura'). At this point, the camera cuts from María Candelaria, with her hands in a gesture of prayer and uplifted face framed by her shawl, to the statue of the Virgin in order to draw a clear visual analogy between the two figures. Less obviously but no less significantly, earlier in the film Lupe (Margarita Cortés), María Candelaria's jealous rival for Lorenzo Rafael's affections, casts a stone and shatters an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in María Candelaria's humble home. This act of violent iconoclasm prefigures the circumstances of the latter's tragic demise, stoned to death by members of her own community. Given the Virgin of Guadalupe's status as a unifying national symbol in Mexico, the pure and virginal María Candelaria's own symbolic burden as 'the very face/body of Mexico' is further reinforced.

By foregrounding the conflict in the main body of the narrative between the white *criollo* painter and the indigenous Lorenzo Rafael over the right to possess María Candelaria as quintessential 'Mexican' artefact, the film invokes an originary moment in the history of looking relations in Mexico. Such a history has been plotted by ethno-historian Serge Gruzinski in his fascinating study *La guerra de las imágenes/The War of Images* which, as the title signals, narrates the conquest of Mexico and the colonial society to which it gave rise in terms of a visual conflict. That is to say, Gruzinski reads the conquest and colonization of Mexico as a struggle by one culture to impose a system of visual representation upon another in an analysis in which concepts of the gaze and power occupy charged and contested positions. A number of points emerge from the study that are extremely productive for the present discussion. The first is Gruzinski's notion of the conquest as a clash between two competing and radically different visual traditions in which he notes: 'a radical abyss separated the two worlds: the Indians did not share the Spanish concept of the image' ('un abismo totalmente distinto separó los dos mundos los indios no compartían la concepción española de la imagen').⁷ The abyss separating the two revolves around the fact that while Christian iconography is predicated upon the notion of representation, such a concept cannot readily be transferred to comparable indigenous iconographic traditions. In other words, the Spaniards' relationship to their religious icons was founded upon an essential understanding of the

6 See Jaques Lafaye *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: the Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813* trans Benjamin Keen (Chicago IL University of Chicago Press 1974)

7 Serge Gruzinski *La guerra de las imágenes de Cristóbal Colón a Blade Runner (1492–2019)* trans Juan José Utrilla (Mexico City Fondo de Cultura Económica 1990) p 60

distinction between the signifier and the signified: an icon of the Virgin Mary is *not* the Virgin Mary but an anthropomorphically fashioned object that stands in for a transcendently located entity that is other to the icon itself. By contrast, the indigenous eye recognized no such radical split between signifier and signified in a belief system in which the ‘divine’ is not transcendental, but instead effective presence and immanence Gruzinski elaborates upon the indigenous system of ‘representation’ by recourse to the Nahuatl term *ixiptla*:

The Nahuatl notion [*Ixiptla*] did not take for granted a similarity of form. The *Ixiptla* was the receptacle of a power, the recognizable, epiphanic presence, the actualization of a force with which an object was imbued, a ‘being-there’, where indigenous thought was in no hurry to distinguish the divine essence and its material support. It was not an appearance or a visual illusion that referred to somewhere else, to a ‘beyond’. In this sense, *Ixiptla* was located on the margins of the image: it underlined the immanence of the forces that surround us, whilst the Christian image, by way of an inverse displacement, one of ascension, gives rise to an elevation towards a personal god, it is a flight from the copy to the prototype guided by the similarity that unifies them

(La noción nahua [*Ixiptla*] no dio por sentada una similitud de forma. . . El *ixiptla* era el receptáculo de un poder, la presencia reconocible, epifánica, la actualización de una fuerza imbuida en un objeto, un ‘ser-ahí’ sin que el pensamiento indígena se apresurara a distinguir la esencia divina y el apoyo material. No era una apariencia o una ilusión visual que remitiera a otra parte, a un ‘más allá’. En ese sentido, el *ixiptla* se situaba en las antípodas de la imagen: subrayaba la inmanencia de las fuerzas que nos rodean, mientras que la imagen cristiana, por un desplazamiento inverso, de ascenso, debe suscitar la elevación hacia un dios personal, es un vuelo de la copia hacia el prototipo guiado por la semejanza que los unía)⁸

⁸ Ibid p 61

Given the radically different indigenous and Spanish visual systems, the colonization of Mexico not only involved the imposition of Catholic icons, but also the re-education of the indigenous gaze through a politics of the image which consisted of saturating the visual sphere with a new social and cultural imaginary. In this way, the image came to play a constitutive role in the construction of colonial society, whereby:

the image revealed to the Indian his/her new body, the visible flesh of which covered an invisible soul. By means of perspective, it assigned him/her a spectator’s point of view outside of the

visual field, but privileged, a spectator whose look and whose body participated fully in the contemplation that the image established. A spectator endowed ideally with a 'moral eye' which, thanks to free will and faith was supposed to master the real image in order to free him/herself from the deception of the devil and the traps of idolatry.

(la imagen revelaba al indio su nuevo cuerpo, cuya carne visible recubría un alma invisible. Por medio de la perspectiva, le asignaba el punto de vista de un espectador, fuera del campo visual pero privilegiado, cuya mirada y cuyo cuerpo participaban plenamente en la contemplación que ella instauraba. Un espectador dotado, idealmente, de un 'ojo moral' que, gracias al libre albedrío y a la fe debía adquirir el dominio de la imagen verdadera para librarse del engaño del demonio y de las trampas de la idolatría)⁹

⁹ Ibid., p. 100

It does not require much imagination to see that the immensity and complexity of the task of visual colonialism in hand was to produce uneven, contested effects, and that the carefully orchestrated politics of the image was to run out of the church's control. The resulting war of images, according to Gruzinski, gave rise to an essentially syncretic, hybrid cultural imaginary. Hybrid, it must be stressed, not only in the sense of physical objects that partook of both indigenous and Spanish systems of representation, but hybrid also precisely at the level of the gaze, in that two very different systems for visualizing the world converged in the colonized viewing subject.

As William Rowe and Vivian Shelling point out, Gruzinski's analysis of colonial relations is extremely valuable for 'the comprehensiveness with which it distinguishes between different levels and modes of interaction without reducing them to the binary of dominant versus subordinated'.¹⁰ Having taken a brief detour via Gruzinski's exploration of colonial looking relations, I shall now consider how such a refusal of reduction might inflect an understanding of the visual struggle between the painter and Lorenzo Rafael over the right to possess María Candelaria. Reading Fernández's film through the prism of Gruzinski's analysis, I would suggest that the narrative syncretically encodes María Candelaria simultaneously as indigenous 'idol' and Catholic 'icon' precisely through her association with, and status as, a visual image. As such she becomes the locus of a visual conflict which echoes the encounter between the colonizing gaze of the *criollo* painter and the resistant gaze of the indigenous male subject, who hurries to hide away his 'effigy' (idol or icon?). In this way, Lorenzo Rafael's action can be seen to replicate that of the post-conquest Indians, who according to Gruzinski: 'Faced with Spanish iconoclasm, the Indians organized their response which was, above all, defensive. By any means possible they tried to hide their gods from the invader'

¹⁰ William Rowe and Vivian Schelling *Memory and Modernity Popular Culture in Latin America* (London Verso 1991) p. 45

¹¹ Gruzinski, *La guerra de las imágenes*, p. 62

(‘[a]nte la idoclastía española, los indígenas organizaron su respuesta. que fue ante todo defensiva. Por todos los medios trataron de ocultar sus dioses al invasor.’).¹¹

This visual conflict, nevertheless, raises not only colonial, but also gender issues. To the critical eye steeped in the traditions of feminist film and visual theory, the resonances of María Candelaria’s positioning hardly require spelling out. As the film invokes an originary colonial scenario, it also reproduces a time-honoured trope whereby Woman (in this case Indigenous Woman) functions as object-of-the-gaze thereby providing the grounds for an exchange of looks. Elizabeth Grosz has the following to say about the implications for this kind of gendered positioning:

[W]hile women are the conditions of symbolic exchange and thus of culture, they function as objects of exchange . This means that the social order and the exchange relations which guarantee it are hommosocial [sic] relations between men alone. Women are merely the ‘excuses’, the ‘goods’ and mediating objects, linking men to each other.¹²

¹² Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p. 147

As a mediating object with symbolic resonances, María Candelaria (both woman and painted image) bespeaks the different histories that fuse to make modern Mexico. But, more than this, her ‘Mexican embodiment’ points to the co-existence within the film of different loci of the gaze. Furthermore, if María Candelaria, visually codified as cultural artefact, represents the conceptual space for an exchange of competing looks with vestiges of colonial looking relations, then there is a third party in this visual conflict whose gaze has yet to come into focus within this discussion: the spectator of the film who is implicitly positioned within the overlapping and contradictory discourses of 1940s modernization and these older colonial looking relations. This viewing subject of *María Candelaria* is structured into the film text in quite specific ways that require further elucidation and which revolve around the presence of the painting in which a series of meanings is condensed. This painting, I suggest, is moreover linked to the modernization of the spectator’s gaze. In what follows, I shall explore how the spectator’s gaze is structured into the film, before considering what is at stake in such a structuring of the gaze.

¹³ Julianne Burton Carvajal asserts that up until the 1970s moviegoing in Mexico was primarily a family experience. La ley del mas padre melodrama paternal melodrama patriarcal y la especificidad del ejemplo mexicano. *Archivos de la Filmoteca* no. 16 (1994), p. 51. Given that the sexual politics of *María Candelaria* construct an implied male spectator, I have elected to use the masculine pronoun.

Looking outside *María Candelaria*

A particularly striking feature of the frame-narrative is the way in which it sets the spectator up in the expectation that he¹³ is to see the image depicted upon the canvas. This expectation is, however,

thoroughly thwarted. Anticipation is built up gradually across a number of shots that I will describe in detail. After the opening montage sequence featuring the pre-Columbian figures and model, the spectator is first presented with a long shot of an artist's studio establishing the positions of the painter seated at his easel, his model and the group of journalists behind him. There follows a medium shot focusing on the journalists and the painter at his easel which, whilst presented side on, is clearly a visually important element in the shot, another device to arouse curiosity and suspense. The assembled journalists conduct their interview as the painter continues his work. The camera then cuts to a medium closeup, this time foregrounding the woman journalist and the painter, at which point the woman's questions turn to the painter's famous image which, she says, everyone is talking about, but no-one has ever seen. That the painter is visibly disturbed by this line of questioning is figured by a series of shot/reverse-shots between painter and journalist. At this point the spectator catches the first glimpse of the canvas currently in progress, thereby establishing an aural/visual connection between learning of, and seeing, that other painting.

The spectator's desire to see the painting is intensified by the painter's hyperbolic language when referring to the image: 'There are things that simply by being touched bleed – do you understand me? – this is one of them. I painted this painting many years ago but I cannot think of it without horror because it was the cause of a tragedy' ('Hay cosas que nada más con tocarlas sangran – ¿me entiende usted? – ésta es una de ellas. Hace ya muchos años que pinté ese cuadro pero no puedo pensar en él con más que horror porque fue causa de una tragedia'). Once the other journalists have left the studio, the painter reluctantly agrees to show the notorious painting to the woman journalist, whereupon the spectator sees the two mount the stairs before the camera cuts to the upstairs room in which the painting is stored under wraps. A deep focus shot brings into view both the easel in closeup to the left hand of the frame, and the door in long-shot, through which the journalist and painter pass in order to reach the painting itself. It is significant to note that the deep-shot means that the spectator reaches the painting before the journalist or painter, once again intensifying the spectator's sense of anticipation. Now positioned in front of the easel, the painter lights a lamp and throws off the cloth to reveal the canvas to the journalist, whose surprise is registered in a medium closeup of her face whereby the camera occupies the place of the easel. At this point, filmic convention dictates a reverse-shot from the journalist's point of view, which of course would afford the spectator a glimpse of the image. But no such shot occurs and the spectator is left as the only participant in the scene not to have caught sight of the image on the canvas. Although the painting does not make another appearance until towards the end of the film – when the spectator, unlike the

villagers, is privy to its making and thereby witnesses María Candelaria's refusal to model naked – nevertheless, the image on the canvas is never manifest visually except through others' reaction to it

Given that the spectator's heightened expectation of seeing the canvas is structured into the film through elements of mise-en-scene, dialogue and point-of-view conventions, why does the spectator never get to see the fatal image? To understand the spectator's frustrated gaze, I suggest that it is essential to contextualize the spectator in broad terms as a subject constituted by what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam term 'ambient discourses and ideologies', which in the case of 1940s Mexico revolve around cultural nationalism¹⁴

The rise of cinema in the 1940s in Mexico coincided with the heightened cultural nationalism of the post-Revolutionary period, a project in which, as throughout the colonial period detailed by Gruzinski, the visual was to occupy a privileged position. John Mraz argues that 1940s cultural nationalism must be seen as a product of an 'authentic' search for identity and an ideological imposition. The first was a consequence of having lived through a Revolution (1910–20) that redefined Mexico, and the processes of urbanization and industrialization that were transforming the country. The second was an imposition of the political ideology of *Alemanismo* (a political ideology named after President Miguel Alemán, 1940–46), which utilised nationalism to cover up US domination and to obfuscate class struggle. As Mraz states:

The period was marked by the development of the ideology of a form of 'Mexicanness' without contradictions. The divergences and differences that had characterized *Cardenismo* were replaced by an insistence on 'national unity'. Carlos Monsiváis defined the spirit of the epoch as 'Nothing to do with "plural country" or "diversity of cultures", *México es uno*.'

El periodo . . . estaba marcado por el desarrollo de la ideología de una mexicanidad sin contradicciones. Las divergencias y diferencias que habían caracterizado al cardenismo fueron reemplazadas por una insistencia en la 'unidad nacional'. Carlos Monsiváis definió el espíritu de la época así: 'Nada de "país plural" o de "diversidad de culturas", *México es uno*'.¹⁵

The challenge that confronted cultural nationalism, then, was how to create a coherent notion of Mexican identity in the face of the fissures and discontinuities that were the product of a multi-ethnic body politic. As an integral dimension of cultural nationalism, *indigenista* discourses sought to retrieve a pristine notion of the myriad and diverse Indian communities and to incorporate it within the boundaries of the modern nation-state. This retrieval took place across a range of cultural spheres, including the visual arts and film

¹⁴ Here I am indebted to the work of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London Routledge 1992). In the final chapter, 'Multiculturalism in the postmodern age', Shohat and Stam propose that a comprehensive ethnography of spectatorship must distinguish multiple registers 'of which I have adopted three namely the spectator as fashioned by the text itself; the spectator fashioned by the institutional contexts of spectatorship; and finally the spectator as constituted by ambient discourses and ideologies' (p. 350).

¹⁵ John Mraz 'Lo gringo en el cine mexicano y la ideología alemana' in Ignacio Duran, Iván Trujillo and Mónica Vera (eds.), *Méjico Estados Unidos: encuentros y desencuentros en el cine* (Mexico City: Filmoteca UNAM/IMCINE/CISAN 1996) p. 86. Thanks as ever to John Mraz for putting me right on historical detail.

and, to put it crudely, involved a celebratory and yet deeply ambivalent representation of the ‘Indian’ as a national figure. The ‘Indian’ was at once revered as the receptacle of authentically Mexican values, yet whose resistance to the processes of modernization threatened to call them into question

At the forefront of cinematic cultural nationalism, Emilio ‘el Indio’ Fernández has passed into Mexican film lore as the originator of a specifically Mexican national cinema. Julia Tuñón states that his ‘basic concern was to produce a Mexican cinema “I dreamt and am still dreaming of a different cinema, of course, but Mexican, pure. Now I have this great desire to Mexicanize the Mexicans, for we are becoming Americanized”’¹⁶. To ‘Mexicanize the Mexicans’ involved, on the one hand, a new repertoire of stories and images, it also entailed, on the other, mobilizing the spectator, by drawing upon historically contingent looking relations. In other words, to pick up on Gruzinski’s tantalisingly open subtitle – *La guerra de las imágenes de Cristóbal a Blade Runner/The War of Images From Christopher Columbus to Blade Runner* – in the twentieth century the moving image takes up where the still, sacred image of previous epochs left off. However, if previously the Church had striven to Christianize the gaze, it fell to cinema in the twentieth century to modernize that same gaze.¹⁷ Indeed, in his study, Gruzinski picks up on the modernizing role of the cinema in the 1940s, remarking

The images of Mexican cinema, during its Golden Age in particular, prepared the rural and urban masses for the traumas of industrialization of the forties; they expressed an imaginary which, in accord with the radio, successively undermined or brought tradition up to date, initiating the masses into the modern world through its mythic figures Pedro Armendáriz, Dolores del Río, María Félix and many others.

(Las imágenes del cine mexicano, en su época de oro en particular, prepararon a las masas campesinas y urbanas para el traumatismo de la industrialización de los años cuarenta; expresaron un imaginario que, de consumo con la radio, socavó o actualizó sucesivamente la tradición, iniciando a las multitudes en el mundo moderno a través de sus figuras míticas: Pedro Armendáriz, Dolores del Río, María Félix y tantos otros)¹⁸

Gruzinski, furthermore, in a brief but suggestive footnote that focuses specifically on *María Candelaria*, proposes that the painting at the centre of the film is a ‘symbol of modern Mexico’ (‘símbolo de México moderno’).¹⁹ If, as Gruzinski himself argues, cinema was involved in the process of modernization, why then was the very subject of this process (that is, the spectator) prevented from seeing this symbol of modern Mexico? How, moreover, can an absent

16 Julia Tuñón, Emilio Fernández a look behind the bars in Paranaúá *Mexican Cinema* p. 184

17 Alejandro Rozado makes a similar point in his fascinating study *Cine y realidad social en México una lectura de la obra de Emilio Fernández* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara/Centro de Investigación y Enseñanza Cinematográficas 1991) p. 19

18 Gruzinski, *La guerra de las imágenes* p. 211

19 Ibid. p. 212

painting symbolize a nation? I would like to suggest that these basic paradoxes lend themselves to a particular reading of the relationship between the 1940s viewing subject and the onscreen painting. Namely, the modernity of this symbol can only be apprehended by the modernized gaze, a gaze structured into the film text, and one that was being actively produced by and through the cinematic experience.

In *María Candelaria*, if the spectator constitutes a frustrated participant in the struggle to see the painting, his gaze is, nevertheless, confronted with a range of looking relations these alternately promote identification with the characters on the screen and prevent such identification from taking place. Such identification with and distanciation from – particularly the painter and the indigenous denizens of Xochimilco – at once reverberate with the power dynamics of the colonial visual sphere, and, at the same time, are constitutive of the modernizing process. The painter himself may, as Gruzinski's footnote suggests, be the creator of a 'symbol of modern Mexico' ('símbolo de México moderno'), but this does not imply that the film presents him as necessarily the locus of the modern gaze. Insofar as the painter's gaze is associated with elite cultural values with ties to colonial social relations, his character invites little or no spectatorial identification.²⁰ As Hershfield argues, the painter's intervention in the frame narrative can be read as an attempt to absolve himself of his guilt in the murder of María Candelaria.²¹ No matter how much he may deny his agency in the frame narrative – 'there are times when life converts one into an instrument of other people's misfortunes' ('hay veces cuando la vida le convierte a uno en instrumento de la desgracia ajena') – as María Candelaria's story unfolds, the painter's fundamental misunderstanding of the culture into which he has intruded becomes clear to the spectator.²² Drawing the indigenous Other into his own iconographic scheme, in a gesture that echoes an older colonizing gaze, leads to her death. Or to put it another way, within the visual logic of *María Candelaria*, looks can, and indeed do, kill.

Significantly, however, the painter is not the sole locus of the deadly look; his gaze is conjoined with that of the Indian villagers who perform the actual murder, stoning María Candelaria to death. Moreover, just as the spectator (recognizes and) rejects participation in the painter's colonizing gaze, the film prevents identification with the Indian denizens of Xochimilco. On the one hand, the film sets up a clear distinction between María Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael and what Emilio García Riera terms the *populacho*.²³ On the whole, the *populacho* is presented as a collective, as at the beginning of the film when the villagers prevent María Candelaria from selling her flowers; or again in the final scenes when she is stoned to death. Collective cinematic identity performs here to prevent close

²⁰ The painter however offers a realistic social characterization of the Mexican muralists (especially Diego Rivera) who, in the post-revolutionary period were busy establishing a celebratory iconography of the Indian within the space of the nation. As Laura Podalsky points out in her excellent discussion of the film that problematizes the emergent tradition of Indian representation the model in *María Candelaria* is none other than the one used by Rivera. Laura Podalsky,

Disjointed frames: melodrama, naturalism and representation in 1940s Mexico. *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* no. 15 (1993) pp. 57–73.

²¹ Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman*, p. 57.

²² In *Cine y realidad social en México*, Rozado argues that the painter is well intentioned lover of Indian beauty (p. 84). Although Rozado's neglected study is extremely insightful and breaks the primarily historiographical mould of much Mexican film criticism I find this reading of the painter difficult to sustain.

²³ The word *populacho* means the masses but with a pejorative inflection. Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano. Volume 3: 1943–1945* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992), p. 67.

spectatorial identification. Furthermore, those members of the *populacho* who are individuated are presented as violently jealous (Lupe), shrill (*La chismosa*, Lupe Inclán) or downright primitive (*La huesera*, Lupe del Castillo).

Identification and distanciation are not only promoted in terms of characterization, however, but also at the level of the gaze. For the gaze associated with the *populacho* is suffused with dissonant vestiges of both pre- and post conquest looking relations and is presented, moreover, as decidedly premodern. The palimpsestic complexity of this gaze is manifest in two key iconoclastic moments of the film. Firstly, there is the scene already mentioned, in which Lupe jealously casts the stone, shattering María Candelaria's icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe. As suggested earlier, this scene at once establishes a link between the Virgin and María Candelaria and also prefigures her violent murder at the end of film. Where in the earlier scene Lupe's iconoclastic impulse is directed towards an image, that is to say, towards the signifier, in the later scene the target of the *populacho*'s scandalized violence is instead the signified (María Candelaria) and not the signifier (the painting). Viewed in tandem, these two iconoclastic moments bespeak a profoundly ambivalent attitude towards the concept of visual representation. To the extent that there is a slippage between signifier and signified, I would suggest that these acts of iconoclasm reveal vestiges of a pre-conquest visual schemata that find echo in Gruzinski's explanation of *Ixiptla*. This slippage between signifier and signified within the terms of the film has disastrous consequences for the object of this gaze, María Candelaria.

If these iconoclastic acts resonate with pre-conquest looking relations, nevertheless, the same pre-conquest gaze is overwritten with what Gruzinski terms the post-conquest 'moral eye'. According to Gruzinski, during the colonial war of images, the Spaniards imposed their Christian concept of morality upon the indigenous masses. It is this imposed colonial 'moral eye' that is so scandalized by María Candelaria's 'immoral' act of posing nude. The film, however, associates the scandalized eye not with insight, but rather with metaphorical blindness. In this context it is interesting to note that Alexander S. Dawson, in his discussion of *Indigenismo* in the period 1920–40, argues that influential *indigenistas* such as Carlos Basauri 'applauded the absence of Catholic domination in [some indigenous] communities by commenting that "among some tribes the virginity of women is not held in the same high esteem as can be seen among Western cultures". This fact showed that indigenous peoples were in some sense far more liberated than most Mexicans, and offered a future course for change.'²⁴ Clearly, the Xochimilcans depicted in Fernández's film do not belong to the 'enlightened' Indians celebrated by Basauri. However, the film does espouse the latter's view extra-diegetically in the way in which it promotes

²⁴ Alexander S. Dawson, 'From models for the nation to model citizens: *Indigenismo* and the "revindication" of the Mexican Indian 1920–40', *Journal of Latin American Studies* no. 30 (1998) p. 290.

spectatorial distanciation from the ‘primitive’ gaze of these Indian subjects

This distanciation takes place on a number of levels. Firstly, the opening *intertitles* describe the events about to be witnessed as ‘a tragedy of love snatched from an indigenous corner of Mexico, Xochimilco in the year 1909’ (*una tragedia de amor arrancada de un rincón indígena de México, Xochimilco en el año 1909*) In this way, the urban spectator viewing the film in the 1940s is distanced both temporally and geographically from the events on the screen. Secondly, in general terms and as suggested, given that the convention of cinematic identification is predicated upon individualization, the *populacho* as collective protagonist prevents identification. Thirdly, the spectator is apprised of information – María Candelaria does not in fact pose nude – that the violent *populacho* does not possess. The spectator’s superior knowledge ultimately confirms the *populacho*’s scandalized morality as hollow. And fourthly, the spectator, whilst he does not get to see the final painting itself, nevertheless does witness the scene of its making and therefore catches sight of the naked model (Nieves) on whose body the final, composite image is based. This last point is crucially important to an understanding of the modernizing process at work in the viewing experience. Even though the spectator knows that María Candelaria does not pose naked for the image, the distance and fundamental difference between the premodern gaze of the *populacho* and the spectator’s ‘gaze-being-modernized’ is ultimately reinforced by the act of witnessing the scene of painting. What for the *populacho* is so scandalous that it is led to commit murder, for the spectator of the film in the 1940s is perfectly acceptable. The naked model Nieves is introduced so unobtrusively as to pass as ‘normal’, and as such serves as an index of the modernity of the ‘liberated’ gaze.

All this is to say that the spectator of *María Candelaria* is presented with the spectacle of looking relations in which certain, historically resonant gazes are intimately associated with violence and death. What, though, are the ideological implications of such an association for an understanding of the positioning of the spectator within the on-going war of images in 1940s Mexican cinema? By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that the clue to understanding spectatorial positioning lies in the painting, whose presence, *Meninas*-like, haunts both the film and this discussion. In fact, Velázquez’s seminal painting arguably holds the key to the final significance that I wish to attach to the painted image and attendant issues of spectatorship in *María Candelaria*. Post Foucault, *Las Meninas* has become synonymous with self-reflexivity, where the painting-within-the-painting signals the work of (painterly) representation.²⁵ Furthermore, *Las Meninas* is widely considered the first painting within the canon of western art history to foreground

²⁵ Michel Foucault *The Order of Things: an Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock 1970)

²⁶ In an analysis of another Fernández film, *Enamorada* (1946) also with an important narrative focus on a painting Jean Franco suggests that this particular scene involving the painting 'points to the importance of representation as a way of mediating conflicts. Indeed portraits were commonly used in Hollywood film when emphasis was being placed on the work of representation. Jean Franco *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (London: Verso 1989), p. 150.

the position of the spectator. To return to Fernández's film, the painting-within-the-film can be seen to share an analogous status to that of its art-historical counterpart.²⁶ In *María Candelaria*, however, if the painting foregrounds the work of representation, then this self-reflexive gesture points to the cinematic apparatus itself. And, in Fernández's film the combination of the invisible painting and the painting as signifier of the work of cinematic representation is consistent with the fact that the spectator is not privileged with so much as a glimpse of the symbol of *Méjico moderno*. Why might this be so? I would like to suggest that this is because *Méjico moderno* does not exist as an object, but instead as a relationship. *Méjico moderno* cannot be represented on the canvas, but instead resides in the relay of looks between the screen and the spectator. Moreover, as I have shown, this relay of looks is older than cinema itself, imbued as it is with the charged and contested remnants of nearly five-hundred years of looking relations.

Given that the majority of work on spectatorship has developed within the context of Anglo-American film theory, is it then possible to offer a theoretically informed account of looking relations within the context of the Mexican cinema? If the response is simply to impose a ready-made body of theory onto this cinematic context, I would suggest that the answer is no. Such impositions amount to nothing more than colonizing gestures that cannot hope to offer an account of the specificities of Mexican looking relations, which are themselves the products of colonial encounters. If however, the response is to take such theoretical insights as a starting point, rethinking them within the specific context of Mexican cultural history and the privileged position of the visual within that history, then, and only then, do the complexities and ambiguities of such looking relations come into focus: looking relations which, in the case of *María Candelaria* are imbricated in the overlapping colonial politics of vision and the contradictory 1940s discourses of modernization.

reports and debates

The *Boys Don't Cry* debate: Pass/fail

MICHELE AARON

Boys Don't Cry is a tale of passing, of Teena Brandon's passing as a heterosexual male, as Brandon Teena. Like other biographical accounts of the transgendered experience, it tells of an individual's 'natural' and necessary assumption of the appearance and identity of the 'opposite' sex. Indeed, the film contains numerous details which attach it to this 'outlaw' heritage: the protagonist's rescripting of 'his' past, allusions to medical intervention, a postscript thanking the transgendered community.¹ But it is as a fictionalization of this true and tragic tale that *Boys Don't Cry* demands interpretation within the context of film theory, and that passing becomes so telling a strategy not only for enacting the performativity of gender, but for divulging the knowingness or complicity at the heart of spectatorship.

1 Jay Prosser 'No place like home: the transgendered narrative of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*', *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 41 nos 3-4 (1995) p. 503

2 For discussions of generic characteristics see Annette Kuhn *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) pp. 48-73. Chris Straayer 'Redressing the "natural": the temporary transvestite film' in Barry Keith Grant (ed.) *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995) pp. 402-27.

3 Kuhn *The Power of the Image* p. 55 (emphasis in original)

It is in response to its generic and mainstream appeal, and *not* to Brandon's transgendered status, that *Boys* is to be considered here as, ostensibly, a crossdressing or transvestite film. Such films feature a central character dissembling him- or herself as the opposite sex, and fulfil a set of similar characteristics with regard to narrative structure and thematic concerns.² Like them, *Boys* builds from the initial assumption of disguise to its grand public disclosure; it prioritizes a love story, and (more inclusively than most) it is 'about the fixity or otherwise of gender identity'.³ As will be shown, this film reinvents the basic formula, and most significantly in terms of the disavowal of spectatorial implication which is central to the genre.

Primarily comedies, crossdressing films, such as *Some Like It Hot*

(Billy Wilder, 1959), *Victor/Victoria* (Blake Edwards, 1982) and *Mrs Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, 1993), derive their effect from the slapstick, sexually suggestive or supposedly absurd scenarios resulting from the central character's 'mistaken' identity, that is, from the gap between the character's passing within the diegesis and the audience's privileged position of knowledge (being in on the disguise). Fuelled by heterosexual imperatives, the narratives progress towards the climactic disclosure of the protagonist's 'true' identity. Simultaneously, the narrations repeatedly remind the spectator of this real identity, through the transparency of their disguise (Cary Grant/Henry in *I was a Male War Bride* [Howard Hawks, 1949]); the dropping of the disguise afforded by co-conspirators (Tony Curtis/Josephine and Jack Lemmon/Daphne in *Some Like it Hot*), or by the involuntary intrusion of an 'innate' gender (Anshel admiring the china in *Yentl* [Barbra Streisand, 1982]). But why does the spectator need reminding? On the one hand, such reminders reinforce the essentialism of gender even if the protagonists' (relatively) easy disguise confirmed its performativity. On the other hand, they make safe the gender play and, especially, the homoerotic implications arising from it. For some, therefore, the genre is insidiously conservative. It exploits transgression only to heighten the return to order, or, as Annette Kuhn writes, it 'problematises[s] gender identity and sexual difference . . . only to confirm the absoluteness of both'.⁴ For others, it offers a rare and radical space for gender and sexual ambiguity – that is, for queerness – within the most mainstream of products. These reminders, then, these disruptions to passing, represent the spectator's disavowal of queerness: they both deny and acknowledge, contain and permit, the queer by-products of crossdressing. They halt the illusion, but in so doing they guarantee its full affect (and if this sounds awfully like the machinations of spectatorship in general, it does so deliberately). In this way, passing is shown to be intimately linked with failing to pass within the spectatorial experience of the crossdressing film. While *Boys* exploits a similar dynamic between passing and failing, their relationship is at once more pervasive, more explicit, and more fraught with liability.

⁴ Ibid p 57

⁵ J Hoberman Use your illusion *The Village Voice* (29 September–5 October 1999) <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/9939/hoberman.shtml> Swank received her Oscar on 26 March 2000. She also won the following, for best actress BSFC award, BFCA award CFCA award Silver Hugo award, DFWFCA award FFCC Golden Globe Golden Satellite award, Independent Spirit award Sierra Award, NBR, FIPRESCI, LAFFCA. See the International Movie Database for details of these awards <http://www.us.imdb.com/Pawards?Swank,+Hilary>, p 4

⁶ This breadth and its queerness is even more apparent in Chloe Sevigny's role as a stone butch in *If These Walls Could Talk 2* 1972 (Martha Coolidge, 2000)

essentialist details and disclaimers from the film itself. While *Boys* is suffused with reminders of Brandon's disguise, these work to *avow* queerness and, despite the film's sensationalist appeal, they extend spectatorial implication within the sexual (and social) workings of the diegesis rather than seal it off.

Brandon's true identity, that is, his transgendered identity, is ever-present to the spectator. Brandon is not so much trying to pass as someone else as trying to be 'him' self. Passing is not, therefore, a means to an end, as in the comedies, but the end itself. In general terms, in the spectator's constant awareness of Brandon's ambiguous identity – in the simultaneity of he and she – passing is failing: the reassuring distance between these 'events' (and the spectator's experience of them) dissolves. In addition, in the film passing is tinged with the threat of punishment, symbolized by the speeding ticket and court summons stalking Teena, and reverberating on from Cousin Lonny's warning about Falls City: 'You know they shoot faggots down there'. It is always, then, haunted by failure as well. On a more local level, however, the fact that there is no before-Brandon for the spectator to 'forget', no essential singular gender to intervene into the narrative illusion, means the narrative reminders of disguise serve other purposes.

There are two key moments where Brandon's biology disrupts his passing: when Brandon's period starts, and when Lana views his cleavage. Both of these are reminders of the physical Brandon's breasts and bleeding index sex characteristics and not gender. Thus, the film suggests, the body joins with the Law as the (contested) arbiters of identity. *Boys* will later offer the ultimate statement on the separation of gender from anatomy in the climactic scene of public disclosure where John and Tom force down Brandon's underwear. Rather than reifying Brandon's essential identity as John intends, Lana responds to John's taunts of 'look at your little boyfriend' with 'leave *him* alone'. The significance of this response is stressed as the frame seems to freeze, and a fantasy sequence begins which reifies instead the distinction between gender and sex, as the divested Brandon splits from and stares at a clothed Brandon standing watching behind the other witnesses. The tableau has an eerie but obvious resemblance to the crucifixion of Christ: a semi-clad, brightly lit Brandon has an arm over the shoulders of Tom and John on either side of him, Lana kneels below him looking up; a small audience gazes on. The composition's purpose is to invoke not the simple martyrdom of Christ/Brandon but the complicity of the spectators (both inside and outside the frame).

The two earlier reminders of disguise are used to underline rather than undermine the queerness of the encounters between the central couple, as well as Lana's and the spectator's consciousness of it. The shot of Brandon grappling with a box of tampons at a store is held just too long for the approaching Lana not to see what he's doing,

or, at least, for us to think this is so. She may have been, as she confesses, 'so wasted', but Lana knows that store well – she's on first-name terms with the teller, and she directs another customer to the beer at the back. Escorted home by Brandon, as their interaction gets more flirtatious she turns to look at him and says: 'wait a minute, what's your name again?' When Lana views Brandon's cleavage during sex, she does seem confused – she stares at the impression of his penis in his jeans, touches it gingerly, scrutinizes his hairless chin – and then forgets the whole thing and resumes their love-making. That she subsequently lies to her friends, saying that following sex she and Brandon took off their clothes and went swimming, testifies to her wittingness. Lana definitely knows. And she knows to keep it quiet.

In *Boys* these reminders also serve to unsettle the spectators' fixed position of superior knowledge about Brandon's identity; their supposedly sharp contrast to the duped characters. As a shift in privileged perspective, this occurs most emphatically when we share Lana's point of view in spying Brandon's breasts. In being made aware of the characters' suppressed knowledge about Brandon, the spectator joins them as a community of witnesses to Brandon's passing/failing. What is more, the concurrence of the heterosexual and homosexual implications arising from the crossdressed figure is explicitly conveyed here through Lana, who comes to represent the spectator's own inevitably unfixed or queer response to the crossdressed figure in general and to Brandon in particular.⁷ The queer implication of 'knowing' about Brandon is not only declared in every rejection of homosexuality in *Boys* (from Teena's 'I'm not a dyke' to Lana's 'I'm not a lesbian') but is also inscribed on the surface of the film. Candace, having discovered Brandon's disguise, comes to confront Lana, who is high and lying on her back on a spinning roundabout in a park. In a composition reminiscent of a certain sexual configuration (and one that occurred earlier when, similarly, Lana declared to Brandon she was 'in a trance'), Candace is framed centrally between Lana's open legs. It is not just that Lana is exposed as having a woman in that position, but that Candace, Brandon's earlier admirer, is also exposed, also queerly configured.

The awareness of Brandon's identity is not set up solely through Lana. In an early scene, Lana's mother beckons him over, peers at his face, and feels his smooth skin. As she does so, John looks on, squinting with similar suspicions. The scene is reminiscent of one found in *Yentl* where an old woman caresses the crossdresser's cheeks. Where her response, 'so young', is a convincing answer to the lack of hair growth, Lana's mother's exclamations at Brandon's handsomeness is not. That the old woman in *Yentl* has trouble seeing emphasizes Mom's voluntary sightlessness. In a similar vein, Brandon is not the only character straying from the idealization of gender (at the same time, however, only Brandon is 'so handsome' –

⁷ See Straayer. Redressing the 'natural' for a useful discussion of how these opposing desires interact within the mainstream transvestite film by way of the paradoxical kiss.

- 8 Julianne Pidduck 'Risk and queer spectatorship' debate on *Boys Don't Cry* in this issue, pp 97–102
- 9 Hoberman 'Use your illusion'
- 10 Xan Brooks Review of *Boys Don't Cry* *Sight and Sound* (April 2000) p. 44

- 11 Pidduck 'Risk and queer spectatorship', p. 99

- 12 Brooks Review of *Boys Don't Cry* p. 44

although this is, as Pidduck suggests, as much to do with class as with gender.⁸) Chloe Sevigny as Lana is far from the 'gangly' youth of J. Hoberman's description,⁹ but, instead, her downy fleshiness is in sharp contrast to the lithe hairlessness of Brandon, or as Xan Brooks suggests: 'her heavy-jawed beauty contrasts nicely with Swank's more refined, aquiline looks and further blurs the tale's gender roles'.¹⁰ Meanwhile Tom, with his pubescent flourish of facial hair, and John, doe-eyed and long-lashed, cuddly yet sociopathic, further promote the film's deliberate inscription of a spectrum of gender expression.

Neither is Brandon singled out in his irregularity. John's and Tom's excited embraces immediately after raping Brandon confirm their homosociality and an alternative network of implicated queerness. Brandon might, as he puts it, 'have this weirdness', but he is not alone. Tom is a self-mutilating ex-con with a pyromaniac past and John, Tom tells us, has 'no impulse control . . . that's what the doctors say'. It could also be argued that there is a sense of an otherworldliness to Falls City which is conjured as general, as shared, grounded in the inclusivity of objects rather than the fleetingness of John's good moods or Brandon's life. This sense is created by a sci-fi quality which permeates *Boys*, from the cinematographic distortion of light, and time – periods of day and night are shown passing at warp speed – to the film's images of factories with the smoke and metallic splendour of space-stations, and of parked cars with the luminosity of flying saucers. These are not just the stoned aesthetics of a 'surreal dreamscape',¹¹ but, in their allusions to the iconography of popular sci-fi, they mean to invoke a community of aliens and dreamers, and to invoke it specifically for the spectator who oversees these extra-diegetic connections (Just in case these allusions aren't clear: not only is the drunken Mom discovered in front of a black and white sci-fi television programme, upon which the camera lingers, but Lana, in her last moment of hopefulness, wishes that she and Brandon could just 'beam' themselves out into the beautiful blue yonder.)

Boys avoids rigid categories, ready answers or the supposition of singular responsibility. As Brooks argues, 'the perpetrators are never demonised as brutish monsters' and neither is Brandon 'a simple martyr',¹² but the film's anti-exclusivity goes much further than muddying the distinction between good and bad. Indeed, it is precisely around the apportioning of responsibility or, rather, the opening up of implication, that *Boys* seems so interesting and so important a film. Where in the crossdressing comedies the relationship between passing and failing reeked of reassurances for the no-less titillated spectator, in *Boys* their interaction constructs and confirms the knowingness, the implication, of *all* those witnessing Brandon's activities.

The *Boys Don't Cry* debate:

Risk and queer spectatorship

JULIANNE PIDDUCK

I first saw *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, 1999) the night it opened at the Glasgow Film Theatre. This was something of an occasion: an Oscar-nominated work of 'new queer cinema',¹ for which local 'queers'² (predominantly lesbians) turned out in force. That night there was a frisson in the air arising in part from a queer erotics sheltered by this cosmopolitan city, but this urban bravado was edged with risk. Queer cultural events always remind me of the high stakes, the symbolic, affective and corporeal risk of queer representation itself. Nowhere is this more evident than with *Boys Don't Cry*. Peirce's film transforms the last few weeks of Brandon Teena's life into the stuff of legend, and Hilary Swank brings him back to life as an androgynous pin-up boy. Cinema traffics in identification, desire and mythology, and *Boys* plays on these powers, mobilizing a tangle of allegiances.³ While Michele Aaron discusses 'the knowingness and complicity at the heart of spectatorship',⁴ I would like to raise some of the distortions of allegiance across differences of location, class, gender and sexuality. Further, the irreducible 'real' violence haunting this 'gold-getting' crossover new queer cinema film highlights the affective and corporeal risks of spectatorship.

Based on events that took place in Nebraska in 1993, *Boys* is, from the first, haunted by the real-life Brandon's bleak fate. The film projects fictionalized fragments of biography through a stylized hyperrealism, drawing the viewer into the corporeal, emotional and desiring flow of the protagonist's experience. Peirce uses the generic frame of the road movie to broaden the scope of address from

1 This term was coined by B. Ruby Rich in an article of that title in *Sight and Sound* (September 1992) pp. 30–34. In a recent update to that article Rich suggests (controversially) that *Boys* 'not about a lesbian at all, falls outside the remit of new queer cinema. See Queer and present danger' *Sight and Sound*, vol. 10 no. 3 (2000) pp. 22–5.

2 I use the term 'queer' as an inclusive shorthand to suggest an affective and political affinity among lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people. Clearly this term raises difficulties of assumed sameness some of which are addressed below and some of which exceed the scope of this essay.

3 I use the term 'allegiance' rather than identification advisedly, to suggest a recognition rooted partly in social experience.

4 Michele Aaron, 'Pass/fail', debate on *Boys Don't Cry* in this issue p. 92.

'document' to 'entertainment' The road movie's iconography, thematics and narrative structure impress a cultural legibility onto the residue of a life In the process, Brandon Teena is transformed into an icon, a quintessential outsider whose transgressive choices are understood against the backdrop of the flat Midwestern landscape. The emotional power and problematic address of *Boys* spring from the tension between the dynamic mythology of the road movie and the persistent actuality of Brandon Teena's death.

Brandon is introduced in a big closeup while his cousin Lonny cuts his hair, short. Peirce comments: 'Knowing Brandon was destroyed for not being understood, I needed to bring him to life in a way that was universally understandable. [I did] that by creating a unified event, by having him stand in front of the mirror getting ready to go out Gay or straight, male or female, you understand that'⁵ This is a stock 'makeover' scene of the crossdressing film, but as Aaron demonstrates, the film eschews the 'heterosexual imperatives' lurking within many such narratives⁶ The closeup a privileged point of cinematic identification, we are offered Swank's face first, her wide grin calculated to win over the audience. Although the film does not second-guess its hero's choice diegetically, the film inevitably relies on Swank's bravura performance as a bankable Hollywood actress And it is this underlying (extra-diegetic) guarantee of Swank-as-Brandon's delicate features and fragile *female* body underneath the cowboy garb that ultimately will ensure the mainstream audience's sympathy

On an intertextual reading, the closeup is haunted by the actual Brandon The closeup rubs up against the residue of photographs widely reproduced in news reports, on the internet, or in the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* (Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdottir, 1998) Roland Barthes suggests that 'however "life-like" we strive to make it, Photography is ... a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead'.⁷ *Boys* is littered with photographs: Brandon carries snapshots in his dufflebag,⁸ polaroid snapshots mark the romance with Lana, and Brandon ritually burns photos after the rape An intertextual shadowplay between Brandon's and Swank's faces juxtaposes the fragmented record of lived experience and the conventions of fiction – and a more existential tension between the stasis of death ('Brandon' glimpsed only in truncated moments) and the dynamic intensities of cinema As a leavener to the tale's brutality, Peirce incorporates the iconography and implied mobility of the road movie From his initial makeover, Brandon becomes a dashing, sensitive outsider His roller-skating date marvels that he seems like he's from somewhere else, 'some place beautiful' The audience is drawn into Brandon's outlaw game of risk, of getting away with something dangerous and fine Kissing a girl, narrowly escaping a beating or worse in Lincoln, Brandon's speedy state of mind is communicated

5 Danny Leigh, Boy wonder interview with Kimberly Peirce, *Sight and Sound* vol 10 no 3 (2000) p 18
6 Aaron Pass/fail p 93

7 Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* (New York: Noonday Press 1981) pp 31–2 Barthes's idiosyncratic phenomenology highlighting photography as contingency singularity risk and irreducible affect informs my analysis
8 Amongst these is an image of Swank in a gangster outfit copied from an oft-reproduced portrait of the real Brandon Teena

through scenes of driving fast, almost floating – and in landscapes shot in time-lapse photography streaked with the light of passing cars. The soundtrack chooses otherworldly synthesizers over the realism of ambient sound (no cheerful chirping crickets here!), and country music adds a note of romantic yearning ('the bluest eyes in Texas are haunting me tonight'). Reminiscent of the dreamscapes of Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Peirce uses driving sequences and landscapes to suggest the escapist power of fantasy.

Boys follows on the heels of a cycle of 1990s feminist and queer-themed road movies, including *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), *Leaving Normal* (Edward Zwick, 1992), *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992), *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (Beeban Kidron, 1995), *My Own Private Idaho*, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (Gus Van Sant, 1994), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994) and *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-Wai, 1997). These offset the road movie's masculinist hegemony, but to what degree does this generic frame allow for different stories to emerge? A self-proclaimed 'sexual identity crisis' at the root of his social alienation, Brandon is a beautiful drifter who waxes poetic about heading down the road. But as the dangerous psychodrama builds, the viewer can only watch with rising frustration in a genre that turns on the thematics of mobility and escape, why doesn't Brandon leave? The overt answer lies in Brandon's relationship with Lana. This complexly poignant love story nimbly negotiates anxiety about Brandon's body, as Lana's knowing disavowal allows her to choose a gentle lover who may 'take her away from all this'. Tragically, class curtails the characters' horizons, defeating the transcendence of fantasy and the transformative powers of love. This exchange between Lana and Brandon reveals the gap between the mythology of the road and the lived social space of working-class Falls City.

Brandon: You are one cranky girl

Lana Yeah, well you'd be cranky too Mr 'I'm going to Memphis-Graceland-Tennessee' when you're stuck in a town where there's nothing to do but bumper ski and chase bats everyday of your evil fucking life.

Brandon: Hey, I've been bored my whole life.

Lana: Is that why you let John tie you to the back of a truck and drag you around like a dog?

Brandon No, I just thought that's what guys do around here.

Symptomatic of the schism within the fabric of the film, the romantic impulse of trysts by moonlight and time-lapse photography of clouds scudding across the plains is on a collision course with the frenetic boredom of trailer parks, bonfires and beer-sodden tensions that may ignite into violence at any moment. Manohla Dargis notes that 'the road defines the space between town and country. It is an

⁹ Cited in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Introduction in The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge 1997) p. 1

¹⁰ As a case in point, the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* begins wryly with a shot of a road sign Nebraska – the good life this image is juxtaposed with three gunshots

¹¹ Victoria E. Johnson discusses the persistent stigma attached to the American Midwest as a counterpoint to urban lesbian chic in 'This is no "Dayton chic": the abject Midwest in *Elton and Roseanne*', Society for Cinema Studies conference paper, Chicago, March 2000

¹² For Pearce's discussion of class and performance see http://www.foxsearchlight.com/bosydon_tcry/prod.html

¹³ Clearly each of the films and cycles mentioned has insights, complexities and angle of critique that fall outside of this essay. For analysis of the road movie see Cohan and Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book*

empty expanse, a *tabula rasa*, the last true frontier'.⁹ If this blank expanse invites projection, the brutality of *Boys* connects with a widespread cultural articulation of small-town middle America with 'trailer trash' anomie, intolerance and murder.¹⁰ This image recurs in such diverse films as *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972), *Wild at Heart* (David Lynch, 1990), *True Romance* (Tony Scott, 1993), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (Robert Rodriguez, 1996), *Fargo* (Joel Coen, 1996), *Sling Blade* (Billy Bob Thornton, 1996) – not to mention a plethora of horror films from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) to George A. Romero's zombie trilogy that characterize 'white trash' as monstrous killing machines or disposable human waste. To specify the (primarily middle-class and urban) international audience of the new queer cinema, it could be argued that a cycle of recent queer-themed (if not necessarily authored) films (*Fun* [Raphael Zellinski, 1994], *Butterfly Kiss* [Michael Winterbottom, 1995], *The Living End*, and even *Idaho*, *Priscilla* and *Happy Together*) designate the *tabula rasa* of the road as a liminal 'elsewhere' for the exploration of violence and queer sexuality.¹¹

Subtle performances by Chloe Sevigny (Lana), Peter Sarsgaard (John) and Brendan Sexton III (Tom)¹² distinguish *Boys* from this tendency to flatten the geographical specificity of middle America and the humanity of its occupants.¹³ What comes across is not only small-mindedness and hatred, but the warmth, humour, fears and desires of the characters around Brandon. The film is particularly eloquent in its treatment of masculinity and violence. Bumper-skiving – a truck roaring round and round in a cloud of dust – crystallizes a 'redneck' ethos, a dead-end frenetic motion steeped in desperate bravado and brutality. From the bar-room brawl to the bumper-skiving scene to the heady chase along the 'dustless highway', from Tom's self-mutilation to John's mounting jealousy over Brandon's seduction of Lana, the film relates a series of painfully slow, erotically-charged and increasingly violent challenges between John, Tom and Brandon. At the centre of this vortex is the ethereal Brandon who, with his 'movie-star good looks', enigmatic body, a certain luminosity in the way his face is shot, promises to transcend the limitations of working-class masculinity.

As the film careers toward its terrible finale, the film's 'devil may care' dynamism increasingly shifts to gritty, claustrophobic interiors, captured in tight, edgy hand-held camerawork. In the emotionally-charged violation prefacing the rape, Brandon is pinioned, weeping, in a tiny bathroom as John and Tom examine his genitals. Tom's first sudden punch to the jaw snaps Brandon's delicate neck around, breaking any residual veneer of comradeship. The terrible humiliation of this moment is marked by two still shots, like snapshots. First, Tom, John and Brandon are frozen, motionless in a medium-shot. Cut to a reverse-shot with Lana and Lana's mother, and Brandon

¹⁴ Aaron 'Pass/fail', p. 94

¹⁵ Steve Neale 'Masculinity as spectacle' *Screen* vol. 24 no. 6 pp. 2–16

¹⁶ For instance see the sociological analysis of female spectatorship and *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan 1988) in Philip Schlesinger R Emerson Dobash Russell P Dobash and C Kay Weaver *Women Viewing Violence* (London: British Film Institute 1992) pp. 127–63. See also Anneke Smelik's insightful treatment of Marion Hansel's and Marleen Gorris's films in *And the Mirror Cracked Feminist Cinema and Film Theory* (MacMillan Press Hounds Mills 1998) pp. 56–89.

¹⁷ Smelik *And the Mirror Cracked* pp. 66–78

himself, dissociated, watching. These stills mark a break in the flow of the film, a point of no return. This is the moment where, as Aaron suggests, Brandon's 'passing' fails.¹⁴ Steve Neale suggests that masculinity is encoded into film language through control of the gaze and the physical dominance of space.¹⁵ In the film's latter moments, Brandon is successively cornered and stripped of his already-tenuous access to the masculine privileges of mobility and to Lana's body.

From this surreal break, the film switches into flashback to portray the rape. The diegetic Brandon is doubly violated – both as self-identified male forced into sexual submission as a woman, and through the brutal police interrogation. Cinematic rape scenes present situations of extreme emotional danger. Onscreen rape can symbolically repeat the violation either by facilitating sadistic identification with the rapist, or traumatic identification with the victim.¹⁶ Further, as Anneke Smelik suggests, the rape of a film's protagonist can annihilate the subjectivity that offers the primary point of identification.¹⁷ Peirce negotiates this horrific moment by anchoring the narration in Brandon's voice and point-of-view (Some viewers will recognize that the interview is based on the transcript of Brandon Teena's actual police interview. In using these transcripts, the film allows the silenced voice of the actual Brandon to narrate his story, retroactively.) Tom and John take Brandon to a deserted oil refinery, harshly lit with neon blues and greens. An extreme long-shot in slow motion distances us from the action as John picks up Brandon bodily and throws him into the back seat. John's attack is spliced into Brandon's account with four brutal closeups that flash on the screen like fragments of memory too painful to recall in its entirety. Tom's rape is depicted in greater detail. Shirt torn off, the camera holds on an excruciating sustained shot of Brandon's bruised face in profile, his thin, bare shoulders racked with the brutal thrusting motion from behind.

Effectively, the viewer is asked to experience the rape from the victim's point of view. The film invites political, emotional and corporeal allegiances linked to known and imagined risk, especially for female and/or queer viewers. An allegiance with Brandon's outsider status aligns the viewer with Brandon's initial exhilaration at his transgressive success as a boy, drawing us through to the film's disturbing finale. Actual attacks, threats and near misses, a familiarity with the continuum of hatred and violence, can intensify the disturbing recognition ('that could have been me') of watching such an event, especially an account of a 'true story', on screen. However, I would maintain that, as Brandon's boy's garb is torn away, it is the violation of Swank's lithe, recognizably female body that commands a much more 'universal' pathos. According to western representational codes of gender violence, the explicit beating and kicking of a woman's body (particularly a young, pretty, white,

middle-class woman's body) is taboo. Watching this film as a feminist and a lesbian, in a queer context, I was torn between the recognition of Brandon as a gender outlaw, and a corporeal affinity with Swank-as-Brandon's residual 'female' body, both in the rape scenes, and in the erotic encounters with Lana. Aaron convincingly argues that the film privileges a 'queer' reading that can separate sex and gender.¹⁸ However, in the film's concluding scenes, such a fluid reading is confronted by John and Tom's violent re-imposition of Brandon's 'femininity', and by Swank's insistent physicality.

In this dense weave of diegetic and spectatorial risk, betrayals and violations, there is one more to mention. The violation and annihilation of the protagonist as object of desire and identification stretches the generic frame of cinema-as-entertainment. Writing about the Western (a close cousin to the road movie), Richard Slotkin has argued that 'the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience'.¹⁹ Confounding the road movie's preferred tempo of mobility and bravado, Brandon does not exit driving fast, in a shower of bullets. Landscapes and roads are deployed throughout *Boys* to contain the omnipresence of 'real' violence within the generic promise of 'regeneration'. Immediately before Tom and John first seize Brandon, there is a cut to a fantasy sequence: Lana says to Brandon, 'Look how beautiful it is. We can just beam ourselves out there', as she gestures to an imagined psychedelic sky sequence with the clouds rushing by. And again, after the murder, there is a landscape shot of a pink and strangely tranquil dawn, followed by a brief shot of Lana driving; accompanying these shots is Brandon's voiceover of his last love letter to Lana, 'I love you always and forever'. These closing clues signify, variably, the Western landscape ensuring regeneration; the power of true love to transcend even death; and ongoing possibility of escape. But given the resounding absence of the 'real' Brandon from the Nebraska landscape (the stasis of death), the film's ultimate return to generic requirements of mobility and transcendence is troubling.

As a crossover work of the new queer cinema and as an example of an increasing filmic and televisual trend towards the blurring of 'document' and 'drama', *Boys* is an important and provocative film. By highlighting risk, I have sought to foreground ethical issues about how the irretrievable 'raw material' of human experience (both pleasure and pain) is formed into preset narrative and generic patterns. The notion of life and death as 'haunting' the frame of entertainment insists on a limit to the pleasures of spectatorship as complicity or allegiance.

Screen Studies Conference, University of Glasgow, 30 June–2 July 2000

The *Screen Studies Conference* is always a pleasure to attend. The conference is extremely well organized and disciplined, the latter meaning (among other things) that the papers seldom exceed the stipulated twenty minutes given to each speaker. The people are nice, the weather is good – at least in my memory – and if exhaustion threatens to knock you over, Kelvingrove Park is just round the corner and the Botanical Gardens a fifteen-minute walk away.

If a satisfying conference is viewed as a time for people to exchange and develop ideas and to recharge their batteries before returning to their work, then the *Screen* conference comes very close to this ideal. There is a creative substance to many of the discussions that take place after the papers have been given, in the main because somebody has been engaged to respond to the panel. Also, in most cases the speakers have previously established contact with one another and are thus able to refer to each others' points of view, so the audience is given an opportunity to observe dialogues on the different angles of a topic. Many may see these features as standard, but in my experience the *Screen* conference provides them in such a consistent manner they deserve to be spelled out.

The year 2000 was the tenth anniversary of *Screen* being produced from Glasgow, which might explain the wide variety of issues presented. The conference listed seventy-four papers, giving one person eight sessions to attend if she decided to stick with a whole panel rather than run from one place to another. It was great fun but, alas, I find the experience extremely difficult to summarise: as a victim of my education, it is hard not to try to find coherence, some pattern or just

some kind of system with similarities and differences in what was presented. Instead of an exhaustive summary, I shall present a few lines of thought which have made a permanent impression on my mind.

The opening and closing plenaries dealt with new media seen from different levels of research. The opening plenary focused on internet uses of fiction with regard to sex and eroticization of film and television series. Matthew Hills approached the 'genre' of digitally manipulated celebrity porn as a carnivalesque strategy, and Sara Gwenllian Jones's paper dealt with *Xena: Warrior Princess*, the development of the interpersonal relationships within the series and its online fan culture. Roberta Pearson took a more general view in her discussion of 'fan fic' on the net.

The phenomenon of fan fic condenses many ongoing problems in our field: questions about the ontology of the power of the media, and the actual status of the representations exposed in it. Questions about the position of the reader (who is the reader?) and the kind of epistemological dignity we give to the intention of the instigators of, for example, a television programme, still remain unexplored, especially in the area of new media. Instability is one of the key words of current textual analysis, but if all of our study objects are constituted by repetition, imitation and simulacra – are relative and ever-changing – then it is hard to make any statements about them at all. For instance, ten years ago some of us found it interesting and worthwhile to look into remakes of popular films and the differences and similarities between versions from specific decades. Now there are endless remakes, sequels, variations and paraphrases on the web. The information – that is the research material – is easier to access than ever, but what is its status? In short, how – or even why – should we carve up the cyberspace cake?

Being the first speaker at the conference, Pearson set forth many of the questions

above. But more precisely, she focused on one underpinning assumption in Cultural Studies, which could be condensed in a statement: 'resistance good, incorporation bad' She held that this paradigm, dominant in the investigation of fandom 'might need retooling or replacement since its insistence on power and the resistance thereof cannot adequately account for the writing of fan fiction' She constructed her argument around a criticism of Constance Penley and Henry Jenkins, who in their studies present an *a priori* assumption that the ways in which fans (and audiences) use media are always subversive of the hegemonic culture and therefore, by definition, good. The audiences do create their uses and make their meanings of fiction, but the questions about the character of these uses remain very much unanswered

The question that immediately arises from this thought is: what are the prerequisites of resistance *per se*? I hope nobody will tell a young fan fic writer of unspecified sexual, racial and class origins, who maintains that she is only fooling around in the web, that she is in fact giving expression to resistance against the hegemonic culture, she just does not know it When developing the notion of resistance we should keep in mind that, unless we perceive all intentionality as subconscious activity, we need to think that intentions matter and that they are significant. Then again, if we start pondering over intentionality, how might this require us to rethink the old question of authorship?

On a rather different note, Annette Kuhn presented her paper 'Horrific films, cinema memory, and constructions of childhood', which looked at how certain constructions of childhood 'are engaged by and produced in the discursive and institutional practices surrounding cinema and its audience during the 1930s' During this decade in Britain, some groups in society observed, or believed, that children were scared of certain kinds of films, and questioned whether children should

be protected from such experiences. It is interesting to consider how one loosely defined film genre would contribute to fantasies about, and construction of, the concept of 'childhood' and, also, to observe the kind of (political) consequences it might have (had) on peoples' lives.

Kuhn's paper not only mapped the ideological-political consequences of children's experiences but also the character of remembrances of those children of the 1930s Kuhn observed four different kinds of recollection starting (in ascending order of self implication) from impersonal recapitulation – where a person refers to her experiences from today's adult, sometimes critical, point-of-view – to strongly anecdotal, first-person narration of a particular event. Violence, dismemberment, closeups on strange faces, ghosts and monsters seem to have been the most frightening things memorized Interestingly, for these children the scariest thing seems to have been a human face turning or looking strange.

The topic of Kuhn's co-panelist Amal Treacher deepened the scope and posed the question: how does the child look? Her approach was that of a psychoanalyst and she based her presentation on interviews with children in their middle-school years The focus of her interest was to find out how films enter children's narratives of themselves and others and, in extension, whether children's way of seeing film is different from that of adults From real children's experience of real movies, the focus then switched to the media representation of a child's memories, the topic of Susannah Radstone's paper Her initial question was that of how (contemporary) cinema represents acts of remembrance through the eyes of a boy child, that is, how does the cinematic apparatus mediate and revise memory Radstone argued that Film Studies needs to address itself to relations between affect, temporality and identification/fantasy. Furthermore, drawing on Freud she suggested that there is an analogy

between the way peoples' childhood memories are consolidated and how a nation constructs legends about its earlier history. At the heart of her reasoning was, too, her concern over the preferred use of what she calls 'trauma theory' (an assumption that unmediated traumatic history may mark and trouble the mind) in Cinema Studies. She considered this particular theory reductionist and wanted to advocate another approach, namely the (late) Freudian one stressing the mediation of memory by temporality and symbolization.

In addition to memory, the question of nation was at issue in quite a few of the panels. Coming from the fringes of Europe, it was pleasing to detect that not all talk about national identity and memory was concerned with Anglo-American heritage. I would argue that the presentation of research on the history of national cinemas should be considered crucial to Film Studies because these histories do revise and problematize film theory and its axioms more than many may imagine. Seventeen papers dealt with films from the rest of the world, which is a bit more than one quarter of the total amount, but many more than just a few years ago. The papers dealing with national cinemas had their theoretical starting point in a number of topics, among them questions of auteur, gender and genre. I thankfully noticed that in this conference the overdetermining category in most cases seemed to be the theoretical context of the paper, not the usual one, namely the non-Anglo-American origin of the panellist.

As we have learned, it is hard to talk about national cinemas without referring to Hollywood, and comparison is a simple but excellent method. Ahmet Gurata presented a paper on Hollywood spin-offs in Turkish cinema concentrating his examples on remakes of Douglas Sirk's films *Imitation of Life* (1959) and *Written on the Wind* (1957). He stated that in the remakes the storyline was copied but the other aspects were

changed to make the story 'fit' the dominant customs and values of the country. Thus, for instance, the basic conflict of race in the original film was replaced with a conflict between conservative rural and modern urban lifestyles. Gurata held – contrary to a common belief suggesting that the remakes are culturally non-specific and of lesser (artistic) value – that they instead are culturally specific and have cultural autonomy over the original. A significant example is the scene in *Imitation of Life* where Sarah Jane is being beaten by her white boyfriend, who has detected her racial origins. In the Turkish version the mother runs to rescue her daughter and attacks the young man with her fists, an interesting feature in a film made in a country where male superiority is quite unquestioned, indicating that parenthood overrules gender as a value category.

Another angle to nationally and culturally specific films was presented in Will Higbee's paper, 'Hybrid histories: the evolution of Maghrebi-French filmmakers in French cinema of the 1990s'. Maghrebi-French (descendants of postwar North African immigrants either born in France or raised there from an early age) filmmakers have been struggling against the categorization of their work according to their origins, attempting instead to establish their status as auteurs. Higbee tracks a certain development in the approach of Maghrebi film directors to their topics, whereby some distance themselves from their original issues of cultural and generational differences, making efforts to demystify the notion of cultural difference as an obstacle to the integration into the dominant French society.

As mentioned above, dismemberment, or more specifically decapitation, was frightening for children to watch in the 1930s, and *Frankenstein* (1931) was one of those films picked out as particularly scary. In her paper 'Bods and monsters: dismemberment and reanimation in the female Frankenstein film', Elizabeth Young put the film *Bride of*

Frankenstein (1935) and its spinoffs under closer scrutiny. In films with female Frankenstein monsters, she proposed, dismemberment and reanimation are at once theme and technique: their narratives include sequences of men taking apart and reconstructing female bodies, while their cinematic forms disassemble and reimagine the imagery. One of Young's examples was the 1990 cult film *Frankenhooker*, where the male scientist himself becomes the female monster and is positioned as the object of his own horrified gaze. Thus, through a low-brow parody, this specific version of the well-known theme takes the male fantasy about female monstrosity so far that it castrates itself.

Indeed one significant theme throughout the conference was that of bodies. A variety of analysis was presented, from enquiries into masculinity – such as Martti Lahti demonstrating how Elvis Presley as a white man was able to use the markers of blackness and femininity to become the King – to tumultuous scenes in *Alien Resurrection*. Young's co-panelists, Jackie Stacey and Catherine Constable, both built their discussion around this film. Constable investigated different ways of thinking about the construction of the identities of the cyborg and the clone, both of which represent the end of the traditional model of the autonomous self (as they stand for the possibility of serial duplication). This apocalyptic, postmodern negation need not be the only interpretation, however. Constable suggested that *Alien Resurrection* goes beyond this in offering a possibility of rethinking the nature of the self and, by extension, a new paradigm for thinking about the construction of bodily identities. By pointing out that Ripley's clones are not exact copies of her but appear 'as a series of differential intersection points between the human and the alien', she held that such a model of identity corresponds to a gendered female identity, porous and fluid, outlined in

the recent work of Christine Battersby. Thus the body of Ripley may be seen as a kind of generative maternal body, from which several selves emerge simultaneously and contribute to reconstruction of identity as intimate interrelationality. This is due to the fact that woman has been positioned on both sides of the culture/nature dichotomy and, hence, the female subject position is a historically and socially emergent norm that changes over time.

Stacey proposed that the successful cloning of Ripley and the display of her flawed and discarded predecessors, as well as the mirroring of the body of the actresses (Sigourney Weaver and Winona Ryder), in *Alien Resurrection* articulate anxiety about an excess of sameness. Such an anxiety may be discerned in a society where the concept of humanness and self has become unstable due to the new genetic imaginary unveiled by science. The preoccupation with too much sameness in this film gives rise to investigating the terms of singularity and originality, the qualities of the western image of selfhood. As Ripley kills her less consummate clone-siblings, she becomes more human herself. A conclusion, then, would be that the film finally restores the unstable image of individuality, but its own self-referentiality – and parodic commentary of cultural reproduction of cinematic genres – clearly undercuts such restoration.

Most of the papers presented in the conference built their argumentation on film examples, either with regard to genre or focusing on the work of one specific director, such as Peter Baxter's study of the last look back in John Ford's films. Typically, Ford's films close with a shot of one or more characters moving into the distance, offscreen. According to Baxter it is not the movement itself but the *movement as seen*, that is significant, the 'knowing look' of the camera that knits the moment of departure into the past narrative.

The object of Harry Williamson's

presentation were Chris Marker's films *La Jetée* (1962) and *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (1966). Williamson held that since these films are made from photographs, they negotiate the paradox of representing movement through still images and, further, that Marker uses memory as a basis for the relationship between image and movement. He concluded that these films are examples of the visual representation of time, that is, Deleuzian time-images. An interesting discussion arose regarding the relationship between the still images and the music in the films. It was pointed out that not only the remembrances presented by the voiceover in the films create temporality in relation to the still images; music is all about relation through time. The music in these films has its own movement as well as 'memories', in that the melodies that appear are related to a certain historical time(s) and place(s).

Only eight papers in the conference can be said to have dealt with television, and one with video as its main topic. The lack of discussion on television is, I hope, just a coincidence. To a certain extent this lack was compensated by an interesting panel named Telefantasies. A common feature of the three papers offered was themes of darkness and the Gothic on television. Cathy Johnson used the notion of darkness to explore the interrelating strategies which construct and mark out the distinctiveness of *The X Files*. Helen Wheatley's paper traced the historical development of Gothic television towards a more distinct rendering of the Gothic spectacle as opposed to the more literally influenced programmes of the 1960s and 1970s. The focus of Rachel Moseley's study were cycles that figure young women in relation to magic, witchcraft and the supernatural. Her starting point was that these, among others, are the kind of texts through which shifts in popular understandings of the relationship between feminism and femininity can be traced.

The closing panel of the conference returned to issues around the web as well as

contemporary society. Jane Feuer discussed the significance of the term 'interactivity' and held that the internet can only become a mass medium like cinema and television if it can be figured discursively by a phrase that 'sells' it to the public. In each medium an ontological assertion masks an ideology: for cinema, a sense of fullness and presence has long been assumed to mask an absent signifier. For television, a presumed liveness and intimacy masks a manufactured and distant product. According to Feuer, for the internet the term that does the masking is 'interactivity'. However, she questioned whether this notion would be sufficient to cover the ontology of the internet.

In his presentation Charles Acland outlined a future image of global cinemagoing within the space of the megaplex. He maintained that the megaplex, its international presence and a related shift in the practices of distribution, have produced an expanding simultaneity in the current cinema, a simultaneity that is central to the mediation of ideas about a contemporary 'global culture'. Showing a concern with globalization was Mark Shiel's paper 'Real and imagined spaces: new directions in cinema and sociology'. It was easy to agree with the speaker's suggestion that Cinema Studies may need to focus more on the concept of space. The relationship between cities, their planning, the architecture and placement of cinemas, and the spatial organization of the film image are not by any means exhausted issues. But this is *not* a new topic in Film Studies, and before suggesting new homework for people who have done their Eisenstein, Benjamin, Hansen and Bruno, to name a few, it might be wise to acknowledge the contribution made by the previous film theorists.

Cinema Studies exists at the intersection of many scholarly fields and interdisciplinary work is crucial to its development and even survival. We need to be open to revise our old axioms. For many years we thought that

there was no point in asking the audiences what they thought about specific films because we knew that we would never find out what they really thought. Yet when scholars focused on what audiences were *willing* to tell them, it opened a large and interesting field of study. Similarly, it has been such a tedious job to teach new students to understand that characters in films are not real and they do not have any past or future

beyond what is exposed by the image or narration. But I get truly exhilarated when I hear that as a starting point of her study someone has wondered how she could hold on to *the insights found* when perceiving a fictive character as real, while moving away from an account which treats him as real. This insight alone made this trip worthwhile.

Tytti Soila

reviews

review:

Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*. London: British Film Institute, 2000, 528 pp.

PATRICE PETRO

In the conclusion to his incredibly rich and insightful book on the films of Fritz Lang, Tom Gunning relates a personal anecdote about an evening spent with the director in New York in 1970 ‘Lang received my girlfriend, the painter Claribel Cone, and me warmly, partly because he saw us as members of a new young generation that he felt might transform society’ Gunning continues: ‘He scorned his older friends that were also visiting him, partly because he felt they had made rude comments about my shoulder-length hair and Claribel’s clothing. Taking us into a corner he told us he no longer wanted to spend time with anybody but young people. “These other people in this room”, he whispered dramatically, “although they do not know it, they are already dead, already dead!”’ (p. 478)

The notion of the ‘already dead’ or the presence of death-in-life motivates much of Gunning’s allegorical reading of Lang’s career, which he sees as a complex and profound meditation on the nature of cinema and film authorship as the means of representing modern experience. Importantly, neither Gunning’s book nor Lang’s films reflect simply upon cinema’s remarkable ability to revive the past and make the dead live again. Rather, it is the image of empty space and the impersonal forces of technology that exceed human control which haunt Gunning’s and Lang’s projects and in both cases are associated with the imminence of death – the life-in-death of meaning and interpretation, certainly, but life-in-death of authorship as well.

Gunning argues persuasively that both the plots of Lang's films and the plotting of Lang's own career (from Neubabelsberg to Hollywood) can be read as attempts to control a system that operates separately from individual desire, according to the demands of its own mechanical logic. This is what Gunning calls 'the Destiny-machine', a concept which is perhaps best approached as involving both an allegorical reading of Fritz Lang's films as well as a meditation on the status of authorship in a modern medium such as cinema. With the 'Destiny-machine', Gunning is able to complicate and extend clichés of Lang criticism as well as those surrounding film authorship. Rather than dismiss as old-fashioned the ideas of 'fate' and 'destiny' in Lang's films, for example, he argues that they are material rather than metaphysical concepts, bound up with 'allegories of vision and modernity' (the book's subtitle) and with the very technological devices (including cinema itself) which extend and defy individual will. Similarly, Lang's authorship is not reducible to a romantic, idealistic notion of genius, but is rather revealed indirectly through the sounds and images assembled, performed and in some ways produced by collaborators. In Gunning's view, Lang understood more deeply than any other director of his time that the cinema did not merely record the visual world, but actually rendered visible meanings that lay beneath the surface of everyday experience.

This is what Gunning calls 'the visionary moment', a concept that complements, and is embedded within, the allegory of the Destiny-machine, particularly insofar as it refers to the cinema, to modernity, and to the fate of individual will (and authorship) in the modern age. Whether revealed in Lang's films or in the course of his career, the visionary moment functions to wrench a character, or a spectator, or even the director himself 'out of a previously innocent viewpoint and reveals a world of death writhing beneath the skin of appearances' (p. 25). Obviously, the visionary moment is a version of modernist self-reflexivity in the cinema: an interrogation within the film of the film image itself, the revealing in symbolic or allegorical form of the workings of the impersonal forces behind the narrative and the shapes and sounds of modernity. As Gunning himself puts it, 'It is the exposing of the mechanical pattern and force beneath the apparent tale or legend that lifts these films into the allegorical mode' (p. 54).

Gunning defends his allegorical reading of modern authorship in Fritz Lang's films by appealing to the work of Frankfurt School theorists (more to Walter Benjamin than to Siegfried Kracauer) and to its reinterpretation in the allegorical reading of Griffith's *Intolerance* that Miriam Hansen performs in *Babel and Babylon*.¹ But he references other influences as well, such as the French reception of Lang's work in the journals *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* in the 1950s and 1960s. Most tellingly, however, particularly in a book

¹ Miriam Hansen *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

devoted to exploring the death of meaning in interpretation, there is another presence that haunts this book – that of David Bordwell, which makes its appearance often (although not only) in ghostly form

In the introduction, for example, Gunning explains that his approach to Lang's films is an intervention into film criticism rather than film theory. He writes: 'Although I strongly believe films should be viewed and listened to first, rather than read through a particular grid, I use the term "reading" here advisedly. This book determinedly picks up the burden of interpretation, a task that certain of the best minds in film studies have advised us either to avoid or defer. I am not insensitive to the motivation for this advice, especially its concern that the sensual and formal properties of the cinema have all too often become simple grist for the academic mill of meaning. However, I frankly feel that although interpretation can be a dangerous thing, it forms an essential aspect of our encounter with works of art and that our task should not be to avoid it but rather to find ways of doing it better' (p. iv).

For scholars and students of film studies, it is obvious that Gunning is referring to the work of David Bordwell, especially Bordwell's argument against film theory and interpretation in his book *Making Meaning*.² Bordwell is not named explicitly in these introductory remarks (he is present only as one of 'the best minds in film studies'), and yet Gunning clearly aims to signal his difference with as well as his allegiance to Bordwell's point of view. Unlike Bordwell, for instance, Gunning will take on 'the burden of interpretation', even though it can be 'dangerous' if it falls prey to ready-made explanations rather than 'the analysis and discussion of individual films' (p. x). Certainly, Gunning is committed to both theory and history. But he laments the dominance of theory over criticism, saying that 'all too often in the last decades of film study criticism has actually meant using a film text to illustrate or exemplify a particular theory. More than anything else this process has given interpretation a bad name, since the meaning was already available ready-made in the theory and the film simply served as matter to be processed by it' (p. x)

But which particular theory does Gunning have in mind? In this regard, it is helpful to consider the opposition between Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang, which Gunning evokes in the introduction and then develops and refines throughout the book. According to Gunning, Hitchcock and Lang reflect each other, both in terms of their personal histories in Europe and Hollywood and in relation to the conceptions of psychology and society in their films, which often revolve 'around similar themes of violence, sexual obsession and the ambiguous power of representation' (p. xi). 'These two directors,' he writes, 'are probably the commercial film-makers who have been most profoundly influenced by Freud and especially the Freudian

² David Bordwell *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1991)

elaboration of the romantic intertwining of Eros and Thanatos. Stylistically, their most profound link probably comes, as Raymond Bellour has shown us, in their common engagement with the issue of enunciation in cinema, the contrasting way each makes their presence felt in the films as narrators' (p. 346)

For all their similarities, however, it is the differences between the two directors which most interest Gunning. Whereas Hitchcock's films reflect a strong belief in subjectivity (as evidenced in central characters 'who serve as focalisations of the story'), Lang's films portray social systems as pre-existing and structuring subjectivity. And whereas Hitchcock made his name as a 'psychological' director with plots focused on individual characters and their desires, Lang became known for an opposite tendency, namely, his disinterest in particular characters and his exploration of desire as more mechanical than human. If Hitchcock provides us with unforgettable characters set against the backdrop of contemporary history, Lang leaves us with an image of what Janet Bergstrom has described as 'the more disquieting, abstract, and unarticulated level of social institutions that seem detached from the needs of the individual characters whose lives are defined by them'.³

³ Janet Bergstrom Psychological explanation in the films of Lang and Pabst in E Ann Kaplan (ed.) *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (New York Routledge 1990) p. 180. Interestingly while Gunning does mention Bergstrom's work on *The Blue Gardenia*, he never references this earlier essay on psychological explanation in Lang and Pabst.

This comparison of Hitchcock and Lang is certainly compelling, and Gunning explores it throughout his study. And yet, one might wonder about the reasons for evoking the particular comparison to begin with. (Why not compare psychological explanation and narrative strategy in Pabst and Lang, for example, as Bergstrom does in her analysis of similar issues?) Gunning himself points out that 'the first decades of academic film studies could be seen as the era of the criticism and analysis of Hitchcock and film noir, with both areas gaining immensely from the insights and dialectics of feminist film theory' (p. xi). And while he would 'not dispute the centrality of this work to our field', he does find it odd that there has been an 'avalanche of books and articles on Hitchcock over the past decades', which, he believes, contrasts strangely with the relative neglect of Lang.

Gunning aims to redress this situation in part by privileging Lang's visionary, dark, cold, abstract and socially-grounded films as more critical, and more modern, than Hitchcock's explorations of individual desire. And yet, if so much critical attention has been lavished on Hitchcock at the expense of Lang, who for Gunning remains more relevant and timely, why has this indeed been the case? Why would feminist and, more recently, queer theorists find Hitchcock's analysis of subjectivity and desire more interesting, more modern and germane, than Lang's darkly calculated vision of modernity and the Destiny-machine?

Gunning does not pursue these questions. Instead, he takes on early feminist film theory, which he associates with Laura Mulvey's infamous 1975 *Screen* essay, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema',

particularly as it was adapted by Stephen Jenkins, who was one of the first to emphasize the importance of Lang's films for understanding the representation of women in cinema. Gunning challenges Jenkins' narrow reading of the gaze and desire in cinema. 'A more basic and pervasive visual aggression underlies the look of desire in Lang,' he writes, 'a fundamental desire to dominate the world, the ambition for system mastery which lies behind the project of modernity'. The male gaze, in other words, does not and cannot exhaust the inventory of looking in Lang's films, since his 'cinema allows us to place the male gaze within the context of a broader modern conception of vision' (p. 236).

One wonders whether Gunning means to say that it is Lang's films which allow a broader conception of vision (a more social conception than Hitchcock, for example), or whether he intends to suggest that feminist film theory has disallowed such conception. The problem stems from Gunning's own (mis)understanding of feminist film theory, which he tends to confine to Mulvey's essay and its mechanical application in subsequent feminist work 'In Lang's films', he explains, 'the male gaze does not function as an unquestioned mode of seeing, the basic established position of spectatorship that Laura Mulvey claims it occupies in Hollywood cinema' (p. 287). But does any feminist film theorist in the year 2000 really maintain that the male gaze is unquestioned, one-dimensional or uncomplicated in the cinema? In Gunning's reading, feminist film theory begins to resemble the director he claims it has favoured over the past three decades: like Hitchcock, it appears to be focused on sexuality and psychology rather than impersonality and modernity – individual desire rather than overarching social structures. But is this indeed the case? Certainly this is not how I would describe Hitchcock or the work of many feminist theorists, some of whom Gunning actually mentions in the book, but none of whom have had much impact on his thinking.

To be fair, Gunning is not the first to argue that film theory – or even especially feminist film theory – has suffered from overgeneralization and repetition by providing films with ready-made meanings rather than new or surprising insights. But should feminist film theory alone answer to this criticism? Throughout his book, Gunning tends to evoke simplistic notions of the male gaze or gendered modes of looking, only to show how Lang complicates these reductive theories and reveals how we are all (more profoundly) subjected by modern technologies which often exceed our understanding and always extend beyond our control. While feminists have long made similar arguments, they have also attempted to reveal the gendered power dynamics at work within cinema and culture. This is a central insight of feminist film theory and it has profound implications for the practice of film criticism and interpretation.

To take an example, in Lang's *Scarlet Street* (1945), Gunning detects a tragic vision (which he believes is similar to Benjamin's analysis of the *Trauerspiel* or mourning play) surrounding the emasculated and pathos-ridden character of Chris Cross (Edward G Robinson). Much like Kracauer's interpretation of the Weimar street film, Gunning claims, *Scarlet Street* focuses on an ageing, lower-middle-class man, who longs for excitement and a break with domestic routine. A cashier and amateur painter, Chris finally receives recognition as an artist by accepting Katherine March's (Kitty, played by Joan Bennett) signature on his paintings – a deception that makes the woman the publicly acknowledged author of his work. Gunning explains: 'It is this "marriage" which gives him his authority, he has taken on his mistress's name, reversed traditional gender roles. His crowning work, his "masterpiece" will embody this contradiction: his identification with Kitty, with a woman rather than a man, his inability to claim his own work, his surrender of his name, could be seen as signs of his own lack of development, his inability to become an adult male who passes on his name, to complete the Oedipal trajectory, and another step towards the madness that will overwhelm him' (p. 330).

For Gunning, Chris Cross is not an entirely doomed character, 'but rather one who is evolving as an artist and as a sexual person' (p. 331). He thus reads Cross's 'masterpiece' (his dark portrait of Kitty) in terms of male pathos and melancholy, seeing it as evidence of a man's unsuccessful oedipalization through surrender to a woman and loss of his name. But certainly this film – and this alleged 'self-portrait' – can be read in a different way. For if *Scarlet Street* reinforces male fantasies about women, it also interrogates these fantasies, not via an allegory about male subjectivity in crisis, but through an ironic treatment of art, authorship and their critical reception.

In the gallery sequence in which Katherine March's (that is, Chris Cross's) paintings are exhibited for the first time, the prominent New York art critic Janeway remarks repeatedly on the enigmatic character of the female artist (rather than on the quality of the work). His male colleagues agree, finding the woman more fascinating than the paintings themselves. While the male critics treat the so-called 'self-portrait' as the woman's picture of herself (enigmatic, masculine, coldly calculating), both the narrative and the mise-en-scene reveal how the portrait is actually a man's dark vision of the woman he cannot possess or control. Just as Chris Cross remains a one-dimensional type, without psychological depth or characterization, Katherine March is similarly one-dimensional, a character created by Lang not as a measure of female desire but as symptom and sign of the male anxiety regarding the possibility of betrayal. Thus does *Scarlet Street* lay bare the (male) fantasies of woman in art and cinema, commenting equally on the patriarchal

assumptions of authorship as on the peculiar fate of women in the cinema-as-Destiny-machine.

Gunning is aware of, if not always sensitive to, this dialectic. Nonetheless, his effort to revive film criticism by infusing close analysis with theories of modernism and modernity is undeniably a singular achievement of this book. *The Films of Fritz Lang* is a serious, sustained and smart analysis of Lang's work, with a real feel for the texture and experience of the films and their continuing importance for us today. In other words, *The Films of Fritz Lang* is the inspired work of a devoted cinephile. In reading it, and engaging with Gunning's ideas, I not only remembered why I was drawn to film studies in the first place, I was also reminded why the cinema is as relevant and vibrant today as it was thirty or fifty or a hundred years ago – and why it, as well as feminist theory, remains for me far more alive than 'already dead'.

review:

Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema, 1945–1995*, trans. Francesca Chiostri and Elizabeth Gard Bartolini-Salimbeni, with Thomas Kelso, revised and updated by the author. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999, 378 pp.

CHRIS WAGSTAFF

Numbers distance themselves from the single object by adding noughts on at the end. Theories distance themselves from individual works by adding metas on at the beginning. It is one thing to collect together an anthology of illustrations of theoretical approaches at work on films (Mast and Cohen, Bill Nichols), quite another to write a history of the activity of theorizing itself. The fear might be that Francesco Casetti's *Theories of Cinema 1945–1995* (translated and revised from the Italian original of 1993) could bear a meta load so great as to remove it from almost any contact with films themselves. It is an unjustified fear, because Casetti remains always so aware of exactly what he is doing, and why, that at no point does the book ever go off into outer space, the discussion of theory never for one moment forgets what the theorizing is about. But theorizing about cinema means theorizing about many things, and that is the value of Casetti's book.

Casetti and his book have been maturing in parallel for many years. A small first version came out in Italy twenty-odd years ago. The author's own career embraces the Milanese inheritance of the French filmology movement, years in the semiotics workshop of Gianfranco Bettetini, periods of research into the theory and methodology of the history of cinema, into spectatorship, into film analysis, into television studies, direct contacts with US theorizing,

and the first excellent monograph to be published on Bertolucci. There are no chips on his shoulder and no blinkers on his eyes. The locution most frequently encountered in the book is 'in other words', betraying his painstaking attempt to make accessible to the reader the theories that he is discussing (the only summaries that might remain slightly opaque to an undergraduate are those of Raymond Bellour and of Vivian Sobchack). In Italian he writes elegantly, and the translators have done him justice (the slips are too few and insignificant to worry about). It is an impressive and enlightening book. To describe what it sets out to achieve means standing at one meta-remove from Casetti himself.

Perhaps the best way to describe it is as a map. But it is a *history* of theorizing about cinema, and so the analogy with a map must be tweaked to give it a chronological dimension. Had Casetti merely given a chronological account of theories of cinema, the reader might have received no idea of the patterns that lie behind the *activity* of theorizing. The patterns are what interest Casetti. To bring the patterns into relief, he breaks down the *activity* of the theorists that he is discussing into three main categories, which are then subdivided. As he defines his three main categories his lines of thinking become clearer, and as he elaborates them a larger ambition becomes fulfilled that his book 'offer a useful sociological reflection on culture'. This happens because, in order to trace the development over time of the activity of theorizing, Casetti has to pay enormous attention to the *institutions* that produce it 'We will examine the *image of cinema* proposed by a group of scholars and the *styles of reflection* adopted by them . . . As we will try to show, what changes in the post-war age is not the characteristics attributed to cinema by the scholars, but the way in which scholars organise their research' (p. 3).

Casetti characterizes three 'generations' by three 'paradigms': *ontological* theory ('what is cinema?'), *methodological* theories ('from which standpoint should cinema be studied, and what does it look like from such a perspective?'), and *field* theories ('which problems does cinema give rise to, and how does it manage to both shed light on them and receive light from them?') (pp. 13–15).

He makes a distinction 'The champions of ontological theories are those critics who are not satisfied with simply reviewing the film but intend to explore the nature of cinema itself, viewing this second task as the foundational and orienting moment of their activity. . . . This group's professionalisation relies more on its ability to intervene in the cinematographic debate than on a precise institutional role' (p. 17). 'Methodological theories usually have other champions, scholars in precise disciplinary fields, for whom cinema is one of many possible objects of interest and who apply to it *research tools* that have already been well tested . . . Professionalism here does not depend on the importance acquired by the debate on cinema. Rather,

it depends on an institutional role (the profession of the researcher)' (p. 18, italics mine) – but is this always true? It is being very generous to scholars of film or literature who have read exegeses of Lacan and Althusser – a lot would come tumbling to the ground if it ever transpired that infants between three and eight months did *not* experience a 'mirror phase'. Casetti's criterion is what he calls the 'productivity' of the theories discussed. Productive they certainly were, but it might have been enough to describe the methodological paradigm as simply the application to film of theories borrowed from other areas of investigation.

In the ontological paradigm, covering the 1940s and 1950s, he makes sense of a vast and varied field by dividing it into cinema's relation with 'reality' (the Neorealist debate, Bazin and Kracauer), 'the imaginary' (Surrealism and Morin) and finally 'language' (Della Volpe, Laffay and Mitry). In the methodological paradigm, covering the 1960s and 1970s, his task is easier, giving him the division into 'psychology of cinema', 'sociology of cinema', 'semiotics of cinema' and 'psychoanalysis' of cinema. In both paradigms, the main sectors are then divided into subcategories. In a review I cannot discuss everything, so I shall try to convey how the 'field theories' paradigm for the 1980s is organized by taking some examples.

In a chapter called 'Text, Mind, Society', he starts with the rubric 'the death and rebirth of representation', concentrating mainly on Aumont and Vernet, followed by 'image and sound' with reference to Chion. He prepares for his next three subcategories by explaining 'the first allies itself with semiotics and that field's interest in the text. The second uses cognitive psychology and its attention to the mechanisms used in the perception and comprehension of film. The third is aligned with pragmatics and its attempt to explore the relation of the text to social space' (p. 239). This gives him a section on 'the textual dimension' in which he discusses 'mechanisms of enunciation' (Simon, Bettetini, Casetti and Metz), and 'the dynamics of narration' (Gaudreault and Jost). A transitional section called 'between text and mind the generative models', discusses Carroll, Chateau, Moller and Colin, and questions of competence. This leads to 'the mental dimension: cognitive processes', which looks at Bordwell. Finally, 'the social dimension: pragmatics' discusses Dayan, and Odin's interest in modes and the institution.

The following chapter, 'Culture, Art, Thought' ranges very widely, and we can look a little closer at the way it is arranged. The basic issue is identified as 'the relevance of cinema', and is divided first into three provinces: 'One examines films on the basis of their cultural significance; another views films on the basis of their aesthetic value, and the last treats films as though they were *sui generis* philosophical thought' (p. 263). For brevity's sake, we shall look more closely at the first, 'Cinema and Culture', than at the

second and third 'Provinces' The questions confronted are summarized as: 'To what extent does cinema bring into play borrowed means of expression or, on the contrary, give rise to other valuable forms? To what degree does cinema inherit the functions of classic narrative or, on the contrary, forge new paths? To what degree does cinema illustrate social reality on the screen, if somewhat removed, or, on the contrary, impose its own images to the point that they are taken for real?' (p. 263) Here is where he deals first of all with genre theorists. Under the rubric 'stylistic choices, exchanges among the arts, revival of archetypes, and references to society', he discusses Braudy, Cohen, McConnell, Warshow, Wood and Stam, and matters connected with myth, with a common theme: 'cinema is tied to the cultural dynamics that both pervade and nourish it: a film is itself to the extent that it leads to something else' (p. 267) Under the next rubric, after illustrating the theories of Elsaesser on melodrama, Grande on comedy, and Aumont on film and painting, he generalizes

When attention falls on a film's stylistic choices or on its expressive means shared with other media, at the centre of the analysis are *formal structures*. When instead one talks of film's capacity to bring new life to myth or to make itself witness to a way of thinking, then one questions above all *social functions*. Similarly, when one speaks of great choices of mythic roots, in some way one is *proceeding from history*. When one talks about stylistic procedures or symptoms or traces, then one is documenting *circumscribed and precise dynamics*. Therefore, *formal structures* and *social functions* can be paired with *universal constants* and *contingent elements*. Cinema carries on a dialogue with culture because it brings all these references into play (p. 270).

Under the rubric 'between archetypes and rituals' he warns: 'One is not limited to formal elements, as was the case for those who reduced genre to a collection of typical features, on the contrary, one must always try to keep genre's social functions in mind' (p. 271), and discusses Kaminsky, Cawelti, Wright and Altman, observing

We can have stable semantic content and changes at the syntactical level (this is the case with musicals, which renew themselves by appropriating melodramatic plots); we can also have stable syntax and changes in content (as in the case of the Western, set in different times and places but continuing to tell the same story). Altman adds that this mechanism allows a real negotiation between Hollywood and its public. (p. 274)

Under the rubric 'representation and identity' he discusses Cultural Studies, and how

on the one hand, cultural studies engages in the politics of representation; and on the other hand, it works for a re-conceptualisation of spectatorship. Cultural studies' influence on film studies is expressed in the analysis of the presence and circulation of cultural meanings, and thus in the effort to measure the authenticity of representations within film texts, and in addition, cultural studies has encouraged research into the processes of identity formation within the spectatorial situation with reference to the spectator's negotiation of textual meanings (pp 276-7)

He points out how reception studies encouraged 'the realisation that film history is not only and simply a history of films but also the history of cinema audiences' (p. 277), something which he will enlarge upon in the subsequent chapter on 'History, Histories, Historiography'. At this point he moves on to the other two provinces, first 'aesthetics', with a discussion of Andrew, Thompson and Tinazzi, and 'experiencing the work' with reference to Mast, Bruno and Sobchack, and then finally to 'philosophers before the silver screen' with a discussion of Cavell and, of course, Deleuze

This summary cannot give any sense of the wealth and clarity of the examples Casetti provides, but it may show how a 'map' that is at once convincing and helpful has been constructed. Students are unlikely to read it *instead* of reading the originals, because the enthusiasm with which the historian charts the territory and uncovers its wealth is more likely to inspire further exploration. However, because the book never talks over the head of the reader, the territory is accessible to the novice